



Coach & Horses Surgery

The Coach and Horses Surgery, St Clears, Carmarthen, Carmarthenshire, SA33 4AA
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14th September 2023

Tracey Huggins
Head of General Medical Services
Primary Care Management Team
Hywel Dda Health Board
St David's Hospital
Carmarthen

Dear Tracey/GMS Team

On behalf of the Partners at Coach & Horses Surgery, I am writing to request closure of our branch surgery site at Wogan Street, Laugharne which is approximately four miles from our main site. Our main site covers a large rural boundary which extends to some 15.2 miles from St Clears the furthest point being Llanfyrnach. Since the pandemic we have suffered major workforce and sustainability issues. At times, workforce issues have prevented us from being able to operate fully from two sites. We have not had GP sessional surgeries at our branch site since relaxation of rules of the GMS contract following the pandemic back in October 2021.

Since the pandemic we have and continue to work under great pressure with a surge in demand for appointments which is mirrored nationwide. While these factors remain in play we have sought to protect our vulnerable patients by centralising our GPs. Ensuring adequate GP cover at our main site in this way has allowed us to meet the urgent care demand on a day-by-day basis through this time of heightened workload. It has been of particular importance through busy winter periods to work in this way including during the recent concerns about high scarlet fever rates. We have been, as a Partnership, regularly monitoring and reviewing the situation in order for us to fulfil our contractual requirements. However, it remains crucial that we ensure the safety of our patients by taking the decision to prioritise the presence of a sufficient workforce at the main site rather than the branch surgery.

In addition, having had talks with Hywel Dda Health Board Transformation Clinical Team regarding the procurement of land for the new Urgent and Planned Care Hospital, the likelihood is that this will either be in St Clears or Whitland. With two new housing estates being built in St Clears and the influx this will have on our list size it is imperative that we consolidate our services and concentrate to operate out of one site.

Opening Hours

Prior to April 2020 at our site branch our working hours were 8.00am to 1.00pm with a Doctor on duty every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday however as stated above, since the relaxation of the GMS contract for branch surgeries ceased in approximately October 2021 we have not been in a position to have a GP carry out clinical sessions at our branch and therefore all GP sessions since that time have been run from our main site in St Clears. There have never been separate patient lists for each site and no patient records are held at our branch surgery.

St Clears, Pentre Road is open 8.00am to 6.00pm with the telephones manned until 6.30pm daily Monday to Friday.

List size

Our list size as at 15.09.2023 is 7252.

Number of Patients access the surgery services in the last three years, broken down month by month

Month/year	Number of patients accessing services	Number of patients accessing services branch site alone
August 2020	2136	branch surgery closed due to pandemic
September 2020	2452	
October 2020	4123	
November 2020	2619	
December 2020	2560	
January 2021	2640	
February 2021	3424	
March 2021	3744	
April 2021	3692	
May 2021	3491	
June 2021	6104	
July 2021	2860	
August 2021	2841	
September 2021	4240	
October 2021	2470	117
November 2021	2436	137
December 2021	1824	165
January 2022	1402	144
February 2022	1409	111
March 2022	1913	180
April 2022	1520	146
May 2022	2280	124
June 2022	2071	188
July 2022	2165	135
August 2022	2788	129
September 2022	3618	130
October 2022	5412	126
November 2022	3545	257
December 2022	2728	177
January 2023	2964	188

February 2023	2582	204
March 2023	3086	171
April 2023	2718	123
May 2023	2879	181
June 2023	3274	267
July 2023	3017	251
August 2023	3553	173

All the appointments since the branch re-opened have been for phlebotomy services and also for chronic disease clinics which have been challenging to fulfil over the past twelve months. Our Diabetic Nurse has been on maternity leave and our Asthma Nurse left in January 2023 with her successor only joining us in March 2023 but still undergoing training in respiratory management.

Currently the District Nursing team carry out a leg ulcer clinic at our branch surgery twice per week. However, this team together with the Health Visitors are permanently housed at our main site in St Clears since March 2021. Diabetic Eye Screening Wales have also been using the branch in recent months following a request for venues to hold additional clinics to enable them to reduce the back-log of patients since the pandemic. This, however, is on a temporary basis only.

In December 2019 the Partnership embarked on an eight month project developing and improving our main site in St Clears having invested £350,000.00 (partly funded by an improvement grant), increasing the capacity of clinical rooms and creating an MDT room and private consultation room for patients in reception, integrated plumbing systems in most clinical rooms and clinical flooring throughout. In April 2022, again with the help of an improvement project, invested a further £20,000.00 improving our treatment room, which included a separate sluice, units, clinical flooring and Integrated plumbing systems.

In December 2021 a Five Facet Survey report was carried out by Oakleaf Surveyors which showed a cost estimate of £63,350.00 worth of remedial work needed to be carried out together with additional £33,100.00 to meet statutory compliance. Whilst to date, some of this work has been carried out we are still yet to undertake all of it. In addition the Disabled Access Audit uncovered approximately £26,000 worth of work needed to be undertaken to bring it in line to conform with the Equality Act 2010.

While the need for investment in the site is a concern for the partnership it is primarily the need to maintain and improve clinical care that has informed the difficult decision to make this application. Along with the concerns set out, in terms of our need to manage urgent care safely we have also been concerned about the clinical risks that could arise from lone working at the branch site. Laugharne is a popular tourist destination and there have been instances in the past when very sick patients have 'walked in' to the site understandably considering it as a reasonable place of safety. As partners we have spoken on numerous occasions about how we mitigate this risk and have sought to avoid lone working where at all possible. Given the current pressures on all acute services (including our own) we believe the risk of an incident where a lone GP or nurse is managing a very sick patient for several hours poses not only a significant risk to that potential patient and clinician but also to the smooth running of the main surgery site.

If the closure is approved then the current staff who work solely at the branch site, namely a receptionist and phlebotomist would be re-located to the main surgery. This will then strengthen the reception workforce who deal with access to the surgery to ensure that a full team is on hand to mitigate with staff sickness and holidays. As our treatment room nursing time is currently split on a rota basis between the two sites, resulting in inadequate and fragmented services on both sites, this will result in more streamlined sessions for chronic disease management. As stated previously, we have not had a GP at our branch site since the re-opening post pandemic in October 2021 and all Laugharne patients have been seen by a GP at the main site in St Clears. No formal complaint has been received by the Practice with regard to patients being unable to access GP appointments in the branch surgery and our ability to cope with house visits for patients in the Laugharne area has not been compromised. All patients who are housebound have received the same level of care by ourselves and have not been at a disadvantage, in fact it has ensured continuity of care with visiting Doctors as the team have been centralised and therefore better able to communicate with each other.

One of our Partners has recently been evaluating data from the branch which has shown the following:-

The table below illustrates the data collected for the Laugharne population as a percentage of all the patients seen in the surgery, month by month, and broken down by type of consultation provided for 2019 and 2022.

	% Home visits		% Face to face consultations		% Telephone consultations		% E-consultations	
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Jan	21	21	26	28	31	28	0	29
Feb	20	16	27	27	40	26	0	31
March	16	27	28	26	36	27	0	29
April	16	33	27	25	42	27	0	28
May	11	36	27	26	35	28	0	38
June	19	29	28	26	36	28	0	37
July	34	30	27	27	40	30	0	41
Aug	19	29	28	30	38	29	0	35
Sep	16	9	28	28	32	24	0	29
Oct	15	24	27	29	39	25	0	31
Nov	22	14	27	29	32	27	0	27
Dec	26	29	26	28	40	28	0	32

The data above shows that even when the branch surgery did not have any GP, (in 2022) the population of Laugharne still had access to all forms of appointments whether that was face to face, telephone consultations or e-consultations.

Also house visits were still being conducted for those who were house bound as needed.

Not having a GP based in the branch surgery has not shown any negative impact on clinical care to the patients of Laugharne. Also with new ways to access the surgery

such as e-consultations patients have a wider range of options to contact the surgery.

The closure of the branch surgery will ensure that the best quality of both urgent and planned care can be delivered to all patients. Medical care is now even more complex and we are committed as a Partnership to offer a team based model of care for all our patients and this is better facilitated consolidating our services to one site. This should allow us to provide primary care services more effectively, being able to offer comprehensive care at our main site and to deal with the treatment of more complex cases including acutely ill patients who require onward transfer. We acknowledge that there are also health and safety issues that need addressing with the current branch surgery premises, however our primary objective is to provide a safe and efficient service to all our patients which is best achieved by centralising our service. We therefore ask you to fully support our request for branch closure.

We remain positively engaged in ongoing communication with Laugharne Township Council and look forward to continued discussion with them and all our stakeholders in a consultation process on the future of the surgery site.

Yours sincerely

Liz Murcott

Ms Liz Murcott
Practice Manager
On behalf of the Partnership