

To - Please find attached letter sent to the PCN and CCG BLMK and copied here for information to Leighton Buzzard Health and Wellbeing Committee and Focus on Services for the Over 55s

We trust you can support us in this.

Many thanks,

Edith Griffith.

TO : Dr L Lewis & Dr J Henderson Leighton-Linslade PCN and
BLMK CCG representatives

Re : EAR WAX REMOVAL

Cc : Andrew Selous MP, Dr C Longstaff (rep CCG), Healthwatch,
National Association of Patient Participation Groups

Bassett Road Surgery Patient Participation Group : Ear wax removal.

I write on behalf of the PPGs of Bassett Road, Salisbury House and Leighton Road in Leighton Buzzard to urge the PCN and CCG to offer a free 'Earwax Clearing Service' to its patients in order to support vulnerable and often elderly residents and enable them to engage better with family and friends and enjoy a better quality of life. We view this as a basic service which should and could be available at all our local GP practices and be assimilated into the role of the healthcare assistant with minimal training and equipment costs (over time) and which would make a very considerable difference in the day to day lives of so many people. There is great concern among patients that they can only access this service privately at a cost (£60-90) well beyond the reach of the majority of elderly people on basic pensions. Many of us have also witnessed first hand our own elderly family members and friends suffering because of it.

Relevant Background Information

I refer you to Topical Questions (23 November 2021) in Parliament.

Andrew Selous submitted the following question:

« As ear syringing is no longer being undertaken in local surgeries, and as self-care does not work for many people, will the Government make sure that microsuction is available in every Primary Care Network area. Otherwise we are leaving people to go deaf. »

Maria Caulfield, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Social Care, replied:

« Local Commissioners are responsible for meeting the health needs of their local population and should continue to ensure appropriate access to ear wax services. However, should a CCG not routinely commission ear wax removal or the suction method that my hon. Friend refers to, a patient can request an individual funding request. I am happy to help my hon. Friend if that is not happening locally. »

In support therefore of our request above we observe and question as follows:

1. Why does the CCG no longer routinely commission ear wax removal ?

We are aware that the NHS no longer considers this a core service that GPs are obliged to provide. However, an article in the Nursing Times (21-6-2018) quoted NICE guidance on Hearing Loss in Adults : « ... Hearing loss is a major public health issue affecting about 9 million people in England. Due to an ageing population, it expects the number to rise to around 13 million by 2035. »

2. How is BLMK CCG continuing to ensure appropriate access to ear wax services?

(BBC News 25 September 2020) Mr. Edward Argar, government minister, affirmed that “Syringing is no longer one of the core services GPs are obliged to provide. Some groups of local surgeries or local Clinical Commissioning Groups band together to pay for them. ... The provision of ear syringing is an example of an enhanced service. If a local CCG has decided not to commission an enhanced service, this may relate to population needs and value for money. If the build-up is linked with hearing loss, then the GP practice could consider referring the patient to audiology services.”

3. Does the CCG’s non-provision of this enhanced service make good financial sense?

Surely ear wax removal locally before referring patients would save money? Indeed, those referred to a specialist are often required to have any build-up of wax removed first and at a cost of up to £80-90 which is not generally affordable. They also need to make travel arrangements when this issue could be dealt with locally.

4. Does the CCG’s non-provision of this enhanced service meet patient need?

The NHS website says that ear wax build-up leading to hearing loss and dizziness is a particular threat to older people. Bassett Road Surgery (and perhaps our other local surgeries?) has a noticeably large number of elderly patients whose needs are clearly not being met in this respect. Generally, many GPs and health practitioners will attest to the extraordinary difference this service can make to their patients and therefore, we ask why is it not being provided and furthermore, we request that it is provided as a priority.

5. How does a patient apply for an individual funding request ?

We are not aware of this and it appears to be introducing yet another level of unnecessary and time-consuming bureaucracy i.e. taking a sledge hammer to crack a nut. Further, in our experience, many elderly patients do not PURSUE treatment which they cannot afford or which is only offered at too great a distance for them to travel whilst incurring even more expense. **Afflicted patients then become more and more withdrawn and isolated, even those who are lucky enough to have personal support systems. Not addressing this problem at the time within primary care can**

only cause additional problems for the patient, affect other aspects of their lives and create future financial demands upon health care.

Efficient Ear wax removal available free at local surgeries would, in our view, be an excellent investment and be cost effective.

6. Given the low priority for a health hub in Leighton Buzzard, what support does and would BLMK CCG extend to our local PCN with regard to ear wax removal?

Is it possible to provide this as a free service, if not individually at each GP surgery then together within the PCN and perhaps even by use of the established private clinics which provide it currently at a cost to individuals? This situation needs to be addressed forthwith and particularly for the elderly and vulnerable.

We would appreciate both detailed answers to these questions and a speedy and satisfactory resolution. Please outline what you can and are willing to do asap in order to meet expressed patient need in this area.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Edith Griffith – Chair of Bassett Road PPG