



Shere Surgery & Dispensary

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It is with great regret and sadness that the trustees of South West Surrey Mobile Physiotherapy Service, known to our local surgeries as Mobile Physio, have to report that we are unable to continue and plan to close the charity.

Mobile Physio is a long standing, not for profit charity established some 75 years ago to provide a domiciliary physio service to patients within multiple rural villages in Surrey. In the early 1990's the charity was commissioned by the local NHS board to provide physiotherapy clinics in the villages of Shere, East Horsley and Send. This service has continued very satisfactorily for the last 30 years and has become increasingly valuable as our proportion of very elderly patients has increased. At the same time there have been significant reductions in public transport into Guildford where the remaining physio service is delivered from RSCH and Mount Alvernia Hospitals.

We currently employ 5 very experienced physiotherapists and the vast majority of their time is spent providing treatments in the GP surgeries. The remaining balance (about 10%) involves home visiting, the cost of which is wholly funded by charitable donations and not by the NHS. We feel we have provided a service that fits extremely well with the vision of Surrey Heartlands (the overarching health and social care organisation for Surrey) who state they aim to create a health and care system that "values the role of the local community, as well as organisations, and enables....easy access to high quality care when it's needed".

It is important to be aware of the journey that has led to the decision that we have felt compelled to take. The Integrated Care Board (ICB) for Guildford and Waverley are the current NHS organisation who manage the contract for Mobile Physio. A merry-go-round of staff at the ICB meant no contracts were created between 2018 and 2022 despite repeated requests. However, during this period yearly contract uplifts to meet inflation rises were agreed verbally with Dr Graham Tyrrell (the past chairman of Mobile Physio). Unfortunately last year, these agreements were conveniently forgotten or ignored and unilaterally they

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imposed a new contract in essence reverting back to payment levels from 2018. With full knowledge that cutting funding would make the mobile physio service unviable going forward, and despite repeated requests from the trustees for further discussions, we were met by claims that they would 'escalate' matters, followed by silence. The imposed NHS funding reduction back to 2018 has also occurred at a time when inflationary costs have been rising by approximately 5% year on year, and so there was dismay when their most recent offer included a 0.6% uplift. As a consequence we are left with a significant annual deficit and rapidly dwindling reserves.

Having knowledge of the gloomy forecast, the ICB's main point of contact then offered an alternative pilot musculoskeletal service project to serve 6 surgeries in the local Primary Care Network (PCN). It was expected to provide home visiting for all of this area alongside additional group consultations. Our charitable donations (like many charities since Covid) have seen a marked decline and we see little prospect of a return to pre-pandemic levels of financial support for our domiciliary services despite the high level of community recognition of its quality and utility. A derisory offer of funding for this pilot was proposed by the ICB to be 2/3 of the current funding, which is knowingly inadequate, whilst also doubling the numbers of patients that would be covered due to the addition of 3 other GP Surgeries.

We are very aware of the detrimental effect on the local community of losing our long standing and highly valued physiotherapy service. We are not aware how or whether the ICB will provide domiciliary physio and all patients are likely to have to travel into Guildford for any form of physiotherapy service. This will unfortunately further increase the existing lengthy wait times for physiotherapy. Sadly we are being forced into an impossible position by these funding cuts as we cannot see any way in which our charity can feasibly fit into this suggested pilot. Our employment and organisational structure is such that we simply cannot operate viably on a budget which is 2/3 of our current one and proposes a considerable expansion of service provision.

Mobile Physio is an outstanding physiotherapy service, and as a result has suffered somewhat from 'tall poppy syndrome'. Rather than trying to replicate an excellent clinical service throughout all of Guildford and Waverley, the ICB have chosen to provide physiotherapy services for all of Guildford and Waverley solely based in central Guildford. There is limited to no domiciliary physiotherapy on offer going forward.

The inequity of access compared to the urban population of Guildford has clearly not been considered. This is extremely disappointing given the current position is geared up to address the specific needs of rural populations. The importance of this was highlighted in the DEFRA policy paper on rural proofing in March 2024. With the ICB in financial difficulty, short term budget cost 'savings' are deemed to be the focus despite its inevitable long term increase in cost to the local area health board when the consequences of poorer health outcomes manifest.

The trustees are therefore accordingly preparing, with much regret, in view of our long history as described, to close the charity. Given the funding decisions that have been made it is clear to us we see no choice but to commence a wind down of our operations by the end of this year.

If you feel strongly about this topic then we do encourage you to write to your local MP and the ICB expressing your views as soon as possible.

Dr Marcus McEwen GP, Trustee, Mobile Physio

For and on behalf of the board of Trustees.