

The New NHS

- what it means for Dover

A talk by Dr Darren Cocker

Reported by Terry Sutton

Dr Darren Cocker, a local GP and clinical chairman of the South Kent Coast clinical commissioning group (CCG), answered a barrage of questions when he was the guest speaker at our public meeting at St Mary's parish centre in October.

He detailed the big changes that are taking place in the National Health Service (NHS) and the role now being played by CCGs which commission 70 per cent of local health services. NHS England commissioned most of the remainder, although local authorities played a minor part.

The CCG commissioning group that he chairs covers a stretch along the coast from Deal to Lydd including Dover, Folkestone and Hythe with a population of 198,000 on a budget of £253 million - working out, he said, at about £1,200 per head of population. There are 31 GP practices in that zone. The CCG governing body is made up of a dozen people including eight clinicians, two lay members and two expert managers.

He explained the major changes that would be carried out at the new Buckland Hospital with the aim of "one stop clinics" and the provision of MRI scans. "It would be a flagship in the new way of working in outpatients' departments," Dr Cocker predicted. The new hospital "must support the local community," he added but suggested the population of Deal might "lose out"

because of the provision of the new Dover hospital, due to be completed in February 2015. Looking to the future Dr Cocker said technology will allow the treatment of patients to be carried out at, or near, their homes. "The major concept is to reduce hospital care to only the absolutely necessary and keep patients at home or in local facilities through integrated working," he explained.

It would mean consultants coming out of hospitals to go into local communities as well as carrying out their normal work in hospitals. He accepted that might meet some opposition from those concerned.

Past and present nurses, other hospital workers and patients were among the audience who asked a series of questions. Our society members called for "step up/step down" intermediate beds at Buckland Hospital which (it was suggested) would relieve pressure at William Harvey and Queen Elizabeth hospitals.

Dr Cocker was also told of the demand by The Dover Society that surplus land at the hospital should not be sold off but some retained for future expansion if and when Dover's population increased. He called on his audience to get involved in the planning of health services and to let the CCG know what Dover people wanted, despite the further savings required.