

To all our patients and interested parties,

I am writing to let you know that Phillipson St Clinic **will no longer** be able to continue to offer an 'out of hours service' effective from 1/1/2022.

Due to decreasing GP numbers we are struggling to fill our out of hours rota. We have been working in a cooperative for some time with Wangaratta Medical Centre, Gateway Health and Beechworth, but all practices are now ceasing to offer this service.

Why are we making these changes?

It has become clear that the service is minimally used and is a barrier to attracting young doctors to work in the area. We are sometimes having to work 24 hours a day up to twice a week and 72-hour weekend shifts to keep the service going.

Senior doctors are also required to supervise registrar shifts. This has created a large workload.

With a large emergency department in the town and local GPs often working shifts in ED there has been minimal demand for the out of hours service.

With declining numbers of GPs in the area and less junior doctors attracted to General Practice we are now experiencing a recruitment crisis.

For many years due to our smaller size – only 4 doctors – we had a cooperative arrangement with other practices. Unfortunately, due to declining doctor numbers we have had to cease to offer an out of hours service and we can no longer maintain such a commitment.

Our aim is to recruit more doctors to provide sufficient appointments to meet community demand. It is clear, that being asked to provide an on-call service is a barrier for many new doctors; they can take a position where this is not a requirement. This is confirmed by our experience in talking to potential recruits, and we've lost a couple of doctors in recent years due to the requirement to be on-call. When on-call, a doctor must be available overnight from 6pm until 8.30am on weekdays, and 24 hours a day over weekends and public holidays.

What will be available if I need a doctor after-hours?

For those patients who do need after-hours medical advice, these are the options available:

- Nurse on call 1300 60 60 24 (Free service)
- Doctor on call 1800 022 222 (Free service)
- For medical emergencies call the ambulance service on 000, noting Wangaratta has a 24-hour Emergency Department.

Doctor numbers.

While we can't guarantee these changes will lead to an immediate increase in doctor numbers, we do believe that it will do so in future. In the meantime, these changes allow us to better utilise doctor time for consulting during normal hours.

Unlike other practices in the area, we have no intention of leaving Aged Care Services, and will try to continue to care for these vulnerable patients.

We will also try to continue to offer a Saturday Morning clinic whilst economically viable.

It is our intention that we will work to expand the clinic attracting new doctors to the clinic. If we can train and improve our doctor numbers, we may look into a new out of hours service in the future.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Patrick O'Connor

If you have any concerns about this decision, please get in touch.