

# The GP Surgery



A convenient, pay-as-you-go alternative to NHS provision



Founders Dr Sudip Dutta, Claudine Cash and Dr Carel Benedict

Founded by NHS GPs to offer private healthcare services in Wimbledon and southwest London, The GP Surgery provides an affordable alternative for patients where the NHS cannot meet a patient's requirements. Co-founder Claudine Cash tells *The Parliamentary Review* that the services The GP Surgery provides are broad and varied – everything from standard GP services through to blood tests, vaccinations and more.

The founding members of The GP Surgery have worked within the NHS for many years and continue to do so today. We believe the NHS offers a fantastic service; however, we were frustrated by the increasing pressures on primary care and the effect this was having on our own NHS patients, including longer waiting times to see a GP and restrictions to certain services.

The majority of patients had little say in their own care – non-NHS primary care services were too expensive and not always available at convenient times. We wanted to offer more choice for patients who wished to take control of their health.

## Looking for an affordable alternative

We set out to create a service that could provide an alternative to the patient's own NHS GP service. When the NHS is not able to meet the patient's requirements, either in terms of speed and convenience of an appointment, or restrictions on the types of tests and treatments available, they can choose to take control and pay a reasonable fee for private treatment.

### FACTS ABOUT THE GP SURGERY

- » Founders: Claudine Cash, Dr Sudip Dutta and Dr Carel Benedict
- » Founded in 2014
- » Located in Wimbledon
- » Services: General practitioner and other services
- » No. of employees: 11
- » [www.thegpsurgery.co.uk](http://www.thegpsurgery.co.uk)

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We believe that for each person who decides to pay for alternative care, space is freed up within the NHS for another patient who may not be able to afford alternative provision. This relieves worry and frustration for patients and reduces the pressure on local NHS services.

### Bridging the gap

The first challenge we faced was how to bridge the gap between NHS provision and existing private provision, only attractive to people with considerable disposable income. The average cost of a private GP consultation in London was around £100 and often required an additional registration fee.

We wanted to make private care less of a luxury and more affordable for more people but did not want to compromise on quality for the sake of cost. We ruled out the online consultation as we believe in order to provide comprehensive, personalised, compassionate and safe care, face-to-face interaction is required.

Providing services in response to patient feedback



### Co-location

Commercial rents in London are high and it is not easy to acquire premises with required planning consents. We decided that the ideal solution would be to co-locate with a pharmacy. This would provide convenience to patients, who could see a GP and pick up prescriptions in the same location. The decision would also reduce potential property overheads, allowing us to spend any savings on enhancing the service itself.

We found a space within an existing pharmacy store, which we could sublet. Although this offered a small number of consulting rooms, through opening for extended hours we were able to rotate services, making sure that each room is utilised to the full, with no space wasted.

We worked through the CQC registration process and obtained the relevant planning permission from the local council. On December 1, 2014 The GP Surgery opened its doors, offering services in Wimbledon, seven days a week, including evenings and weekends.

### Allowing patients to inform provision

Over the course of our first year we gathered patient feedback and revised our business model to meet their preferences, altering opening times and adding services that they were struggling to access elsewhere.

As well as seven GPs and four nurses providing services such as general consultations, blood tests, vaccinations and sexual health, we also host many other clinicians. These include a plastic surgeon who provides skin surgery, a consultant radiologist who offers cortisone joint injections and an ultrasonography team offering a range of ultrasound scans. We continue





Healthcare available  
at times convenient to  
patients

to listen to patient feedback and try to fill the gap in available provision wherever we can, while keeping prices as affordable as possible.

### Overcoming obstacles

We have faced frustration along the way, including the need to apply our own interpretation to some often unclear regulatory guidelines. This can create uncertainty as to the best course of action to take when planning services.

A further challenge occurred in late 2018 when Google changed their algorithms, resulting in a worrying lack of visibility of our website, crucial to attracting patients to the service. After a major website redesign and considerable web-based advertising at additional costs, we managed to ensure that people could once again see our services when searching online.

It has also been a turbulent time for staffing with the uncertainty over Brexit impacting on some of our non-UK national reception and administration staff whose future in the UK seems uncertain.

Recent high increases in GP indemnity costs have also had to be absorbed while trying to maintain affordability for patients.

In spite of these challenges, however, The GP Surgery in Wimbledon is now operating at full capacity, with over 23,000 patients having used our services in the past five years and this figure rising daily.

### The future

We are now in an expansion phase, having been cautious not to overextend ourselves until we were certain that we had our model absolutely right. Our second site has been secured and we hope to open in early 2020, with further sites anticipated later in the year.

Our ambition is to offer top-quality and affordable services to more patients who are happy and able to seek an alternative to the NHS in order to have control over what, where and when they receive the care that they require.

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