Introduction
The GMED out of hours service is a vital service for the Grampian population and it is important that patients, carers and the public have accurate and up-to-date information about the service.

NHS Grampian is committed to maintaining a high quality, safe, reliable and sustainable out of hours service and no significant changes are planned.

This information sheet explains:
• what the GMED service is
• why changes have recently been discussed
• what decisions have been made

What is GMED?
The GMED out of hours service deals with the non-emergency, urgent health needs of patients. It operates from 6pm to 8am, Monday to Friday; and 24 hours a day, Saturday, Sunday and public holidays. The service is open to all residents and temporary residents in Grampian.

GMED is NOT an extension of the service provided by GP practices during the day. It is ONLY for patients with an urgent medical condition who cannot wait until the next day when their GP practice is open.

How do I access the service?
When your GP surgery is closed and you feel your health needs cannot wait until it re-opens, call NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24. NHS 24 can answer questions about your health and offer advice and will arrange for the GMED service to contact you if required.

What should I do in an emergency?
If you think that someone’s life is at risk you should call the Scottish Ambulance Service on 999 right away. If you call NHS 24 and they believe an ambulance is required one will be dispatched (NHS 24 has direct links to the Scottish Ambulance Service).

How does the GMED service work?
GMED is a Grampian wide urgent medical service covering all locations in the Grampian area (except Braemar where there are separate arrangements).

The service has a control base in Aberdeen and seven centres and twelve cars operating throughout Grampian. An average of 9000 contacts a month are made to the service.

The service is delivered by a range of health professionals and support staff including GPs, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, drivers and call handlers. GMED also works with ambulance paramedics, community hospital based minor injuries nurses, community psychiatric nurses (CPNs) and others who provide out of hours urgent health care.

Depending on the health needs and circumstances of the individual, GMED has a system in place that directs patients to the most appropriate professional to provide advice and/or assessment within a reasonable timescale in the most appropriate setting. This could mean patients will be offered telephone advice/consultation, asked to come to their nearest centre or receive a home visit.
The service operates as a network of health professionals rather than individual clinicians working in isolation. Working together and providing cross cover across Grampian ensures a safe and effective service which matches resources to the peaks and troughs of patient demand.

**Are you making changes to GMED?**
GMED, in common with all NHS services, is continually working to ensure the service is safe, reliable and effective. NHS Grampian also needs to ensure the service is sustainable. To do so, the service must be flexible and responsive to changes in the staff that are available and to advances in technology.

This flexibility was built into the service model when the GMED service was introduced in 2004 and was part of the wide-ranging public consultation carried out at the time.

Like all public sector organisations, NHS Grampian is facing significant financial challenges. To try and address this, all services were asked to consider where changes could be made. As part of this process, the GMED General Manager met with clinical and non-clinical staff across Grampian to discuss how the service could be delivered more efficiently whilst still maintaining a safe and reliable service.

**Are you closing any GMED centres?**
There are currently no plans to reduce the number of GMED centres in Grampian.

**What changes are you planning?**
No significant changes are planned to the GMED out of hours service.

As outlined above, the GMED service model is flexible and the main change is around how members of the multi-disciplinary team are used to deliver a service that best meets the needs of patients whilst at the same time using resources wisely.

In practice this means:
- increasing the number of shifts covered by nurse practitioners across Grampian
- making small changes to shifts which, at certain times, are consistently quiet.

Small changes to shifts at Inverurie and Stonehaven have recently been made and these follow similar changes successfully introduced in other parts of Grampian.

These decisions have been made after careful consideration and robust data analysis by the GMED clinical and management team to ensure safe and reliable medical cover is not compromised.

**Do nurses have the training and experience to take on GP work?**
GMED only employs experienced senior nurses who then receive additional training to become nurse practitioners.

GMED nurse practitioners can manage approximately 95% of patients and always have access to telephone support from a GP. The training is delivered in conjunction with the Robert Gordon University with additional support and mentoring provided by GPs. The training is individually tailored and includes the same clinical examination skills training as doctors; drug prescribing and training in the diagnosis and treatment of a wide variety of common illnesses and emergencies.

**Why are you using more nurse practitioners?**
Following the introduction of the new GP contract in 2004, most GPs opted out of the responsibility for providing 24 hour care. At that time it became the responsibility of NHS Grampian to provide out of hours cover for the population of Grampian.

Initially, many GPs continued to do out of hours shifts but this number has fallen year by year. Gaps in the rota became
difficult to fill and, to ensure a safe service, GMED has employed an increasing number of salaried GPs and nurse practitioners. Some GPs (who work in GP practices) and locum doctors also continue to do work for GMED.

Who decides how the service should be delivered?
The GMED General Manager has a responsibility to lead, develop and co-ordinate all operational aspects of the GMED service to ensure the delivery of a safe, efficient and effective out of hours service to the public of Grampian. The General Manager does this with the support of the GMED management team in discussion with medical and clinical staff and NHS Grampian senior managers.

What about the future?
We cannot ignore the challenging financial climate facing the NHS. NHS Grampian has a funding gap of £34 million for this financial year (2010/11) and all services and departments have to identify where efficiencies can be made to release funding to close this gap.

For GMED this means £400 000 of efficiency savings this year from a service budget of £8.1 million. The financial challenges are unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future and GMED will need to continue to evolve and review its model of care.

However, GMED is and always has been a responsive and flexible service and is committed to working with other NHS Grampian services as well as partners like the Scottish Centre for Tele-Health, NHS24 and the Scottish Ambulance Service to help ensure a safe, reliable, effective and sustainable service for the Grampian population.

Although there are financial challenges, there are also exciting opportunities ahead. For example the development of the new Emergency Care Centre on the Foresterhill site, due to open in 2012, will further enhance the quality of the service for patients needing urgent or emergency care and treatment.

Involving patients and the public
As part of the commitment to listen to the experiences of patients to improve services, GMED carry out regular patient surveys. Results show that patients are very satisfied with the service provided.

The NHS also has a duty to inform and involve the public when making changes to services and a formal consultation must be conducted for any major service change. The changes outlined above are not major but GMED is committed to keeping patients and the public informed about developments.

Meetings with local representatives will be arranged in communities where there are particular concerns over recent changes.

GMED will follow the national "Informing, Engaging and Consulting People in Developing Health & Community Care Services" guidance when considering any future changes.

For further information:
Write to: Freepost
NHS Grampian

Email: nhsg.involve@nhs.net

This newsletter is also available in large print and on CD.

Other formats and languages can be supplied on request.