St Albans Medical Centre and Nirmala Medical Centre

Introduction:
Nirmala Medical Centre, is located in Bestwood Park, Nottingham, and serves a registered list of 1,969 patients (30/6/14). The Practice PLC is the provider, and the practice is an achieving practice on quality measures. The corporate which manages the practice is a well-known Medical Services group who have a large presence in the GP services market. They also manage the St Albans Medical Centre in Bulwell, two miles away. The practice has suffered in recent times as the registered list has declined, and the regular GP performer left and the Corporate has back-filled with temporary Locums. However, this has not adversely affected the performance or patient satisfaction at the surgery. There are few comments on NHS choices and the three that are recorded are about access and appointments. There has not been a CQC inspection.

St Albans Medical Centre, is located in Hucknall Lane, Bulwell, Nottingham and serves a registered list of 5,580 (30/6/14). As stated above, the Practice PLC is the provider, and the practice is an achieving practice on quality measures.

The Providers (The Practice PLC) gave six months’ notice to terminate their GMS contract at Nirmala, to be effective from 30 September 2014. This would involve dispersing the patient list and closing the Nirmala Medical Centre. A report was made to the Health Scrutiny Panel on 28 May 2014 confirming future arrangements and the stakeholder engagement that was planned.

However, following concerns from the local MP, Councillor, local residents and pharmacy, the Area Team have explored ways of continuing a service at the Surgery. The Practice plc subsequently expressed an interest in merging the services and operating the Surgery as a branch of their practice at St Albans and detailed their proposals which were presented to the Area Team Primary Care Panel.

Proposal
The practices have jointly approached the NHS England Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Area Team to seek permission to merge the practices. The proposal requests the continuation of one consolidated practice under one contract,
but with Nirmala Medical Centre remaining open as a branch surgery to St Albans Medical Centre.

The Practice presented their proposals for operating the two sites, and subsequently enhanced these at the request of the Area Team in order to meet some clinical concerns. These now involve the branch remaining open for the same number of sessions as at present.

Their plan is for a reduced number of GP sessions at Nirmala, down to five but to compensate they will have four new nurse practitioner (NP) sessions. So with the NP meeting many of the patient demands, they feel this adequately covers the needs to the patients there. There will additionally be two Practice Nurse sessions and two Health Care Assistant sessions.

There will be an additional or new 3 GP sessions at St Albans, and the merger will allow patients to be seen at either surgery giving greater choice and flexibility for patients. In additional, when there is no GP at Nirmala, a GP at St Albans will always be available for telephone conversation. If in time, the pattern or model of service requires amendment, then having Nirmala as a branch of St Albans will allow this, and they will monitor patient usage and adjust the pattern as necessary.

St Albans will be an additionally option for Nirmala patients, which will give patients choice to attend at Nirmala or at St Albans.

The merger will also allow greater flexibility in the use of reception and administrative staff. These plans have been scrutinised by the Medical Director and agreed.

In considering this application, Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Area Team has sought the view of Nottingham City Clinical Commissioning Group which is developing the Primary Care Strategy within the area. The Clinical Commissioning Group has indicated that this merger change would fit with the Primary Care Strategy as planned.

Impact/benefits for local population
The main benefit is that this solution allows a surgery to remain in Bestwood Park, whereas the termination would have involved the closure of the surgery. In addition, the merger will ensure continuity of care for patients, end uncertainty, and will not involve patient dispersal which other options would.

The local MP and Councillor had stressed that many residents around Bestwood Park did not have cars, and bus routes would make travelling to alternative practices difficult for many. This solution will ensure a surgery is retained in this deprived area of the City, and will minimise any disruption for patients, and will support the local pharmacy and other businesses in the area.
The merger will allow greater flexibility of appointments, with patients at both Nirmala and St Albans Medical Centres being able to access appointments and services at either site in the future.

Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Area Team consideration:

The Area Team initially advised the Primary Care Panel of the contract termination at on 17 April 2014.

A verbal update was provided to the Primary Care Panel on 19 June 2014 that following patient and other stakeholder concerns, the Area Team were exploring options to retain a surgery at Nirmala. The Panel supported this approach.

A report was presented to the Panel in July requesting approval of the merger, but some clarification was requested about the level of clinical cover provided under the merger proposals.

A further report was made to the Primary Care Panel on 21 August 2014 and after assurances about the clinical sessions and appointments available, the Panel approved the merger.
Dear Patient

Following on from previous correspondence sent by NHS England in Nottinghamshire which discussed the possible dispersal of patients or closure of The Practice Nirmala, we would like to reassure you that the practice is not closing and inform you of an important change relating to both the Practice Nirmala and The Practice St Albans.

The contracts that our company, The Practice Group, currently holds with NHS England in Nottinghamshire are being amended on 1st October 2014, which will result in The Practice Nirmala merging with The Practice St Albans and becoming a branch site.

We would like to reassure you that we will continue to provide you with our usual high level of care and highlight that the merge will provide benefits for patients from both practices as access will be improved in terms of services, availability of appointments and the choice of their location.

If you have any questions regarding the above then please let our staff know and we will do our best to answer them. Please call us on XXXXX or XXXXX. Your views are important to us and we are committed to listening to you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Rose

Clinical Director for The Practice
Appendix 3

Patient, Staff and other Stakeholder Engagement details:

NHS England Communication Team has met with The Practice to discuss and plan patient communications. This includes patient letters, notices in reception/noticeboards, updates on practice websites etc. The Patient Representative Group have been advised and they will be updated at next meeting in first week in October.

Staff have been briefed at both sites from mid-June by The Practice Business Manager responsible for this area.

The local MP and Councillor were advised by the Area Team on 13 June of the potential closure and the efforts the Area Team were making to resolve the long term future for patients. Following the decision to investigate a merger to keep Nirmala open, both the MP and Councillor were advised of this on 27 June. They were advised of the final approval for the merger on 2 September 2014.