New model taking shape

WORK is continuing on the development of a new model of healthcare provision on the Small Isles.

NHS Highland has been managing the visiting GP service on the islands since the beginning of the year.

Dr Angus Venters, of the combined practices of Broadford and Sleat on Skye, travels from Armadale to Eigg every Tuesday and, on alternate Thursdays, visits Canna and Rum, and Eigg and Muck.

The intention had been that Dr Venters would be joined in providing the service by Dr Clare Whitney, of Broadford Medical Practice, along with another GP to be recruited.

That new GP has now been appointed: Dr Geoff Boyes, from Hampshire, will start his new role on 23rd February.

However, impending motherhood means that Dr Whitney will soon be departing on maternity leave, so NHS Highland is in the process of recruiting a long-term locum for her.

Dr Boyes (58), who will also be based in South Skye, said: “I have been in my present practice for almost 30 years and felt I had reached the stage in life when I wanted a fresh challenge.

“I am sure that this post will prove to be an exciting and interesting challenge for me.”

The new model of GP provision is only part of the development of a safe and sustainable system of healthcare provision for the Small Isles – a system in which you, the residents, will have a key part to play.

NHS Highland has created a brand-new role for the islands, rural health and social care support worker, and hopes to appoint a number of people to fulfil this original new role.

The support workers will be given training – some of it online – to carry out a wide range of tasks, from removing and re-applying simple wound dressings to helping a patient use teleconferencing equipment.

Mary Boyle, who heads NHS Highland’s integrated team for the area, said: “This innovative new role has been designed to give islanders an opportunity to help with their neighbours’ healthcare.

“These are exciting new posts for us, something akin to a care at home worker’s or a healthcare assistant’s, and I am sure that those who are appointed will play an important part in the delivery of care on the islands.”

Gill McVicar, director of operations for NHS Highland’s north and west operational unit, added: “What we are doing in the Small Isles is in many ways unique. But we have been looking at how healthcare needs are met in other remote and rural places across the world, from New Zealand to Alaska, and we have borrowed ideas to come up with something we believe is the way forward.”

Excited to be joining team

Dr Geoff Boyes

I’VE recently been appointed to work across the combined Sleat and Broadford practices with a view to helping provide GP provision on the Small Isles.

Born in Southampton, I studied medicine in St Andrews and Manchester, qualifying as a GP in 1984.

I have been the senior partner in a large GP practice in semi-rural Hampshire providing cover for the local community hospital.

I have a special interest in family medicine, psychiatry and contraception, and have additional qualifications to supply LARCs (long-acting reversible contraception).

“I’m excited to be offered the opportunity to help support and develop the new model of healthcare provision for the Small Isles, and will be joined in this new challenge by my wife Karin, who is a textile artist and who shares my enthusiasm for moving to the island of Skye.”

Dr Geoff Boyes
Healthcare on the Small Isles

Gearing up for changes

PEOPLE come first in developing a safe and sustainable healthcare system for the Small Isles – but equipment is important too.

NHS Highland has been developing IT links with a view to ensuring remote access to the Small Isles from Broadford and Sleat Medical Practices and MacKinnon Memorial Hospital on Skye.

Telehealth facilities in the shape of a video-conferencing unit have been installed in the Small Isles Medical Practice on Eigg, and it is planned to have iPads available on Canna, Muck and Rum to allow patients to access telecare, by which they can speak to their GP just like in a face-to-face consultation.

NHS Highland has made some small structural changes to the medical centre on Eigg, and will be looking to carry out more significant structural improvements to the former GP’s house nearby, with a view to converting it into a healthcare and telehealth facility.

New rural support team may be solution to long-standing problem

NHS HIGHLAND has long experienced difficulties attracting and retaining healthcare professionals to some of its remote and rural areas, particularly on Scotland’s west coast.

Now, with funding support from ‘Being Here’, a Scottish Government initiative to design and test solutions to this problem, NHS Highland is recruiting a rural support team – a pool of healthcare professionals who would provide cover where and when it is needed. And that will include the Small Isles.

Dr Geoff Boyes will start work as part of the rural support team on 23rd February, and will be one of the doctors to provide the visiting GP service on the Small Isles.

Tracy Ligema, NHS Highland’s west area manager, said: “The rural support team will consist of GPs, advance nurse practitioners, unscheduled care practitioners and paramedic practitioners working together in a team that is a virtual network. This means that, although they may be geographically distributed across a large area and working in different parts of that area, they are all part of the same team and link with each other daily, sometimes by video-conferencing, for professional support. Individuals within the team may have a main base and work in other areas as required or they may be fully rotational, routinely working across a number of different areas and bases.”

The team will provide in-hours GP primary care for salaried practices – for example by supporting the Small Isles visiting service and staffing the practice in Acharacle at the eastern end of the Ardnamurchan peninsula – and will provide cover for annual leave, study leave, sickness, etc, in salaried GP practices.

The nurse and paramedic practitioners in the team will work alongside the GPs to provide additional support and capacity in-hours, such as by holding joint clinics, working with the Scottish Ambulance Service and community nursing teams to support local community capacity for anticipatory care, to provide additional clinical support that facilitates early discharge from hospital and which helps people to stay at home independently for longer.

They will also provide frontline clinical responses out of hours with remote GP support.

As well as Dr Boyes, two other GPs have been appointed to the rural support team, both of them to be based in Acharacle. Advanced nurse practitioners and unscheduled care practitioners have also been appointed, along with someone to manage the team, and further interviews are planned.

The health board has also been considering what facilities should be used in the future by GPs visiting the other islands.

One development most islanders will be aware of is the appointment of Sandaig Ltd, of Mallaig, to provide a charter boat service to ferry health professionals from Armadale to the Small Isles. The service will be provided by two vessels, the Venturer and the Vanguard (pictured), under a two-year contract.

Unfortunately, the recent bad weather has prevented the boat sailings and service provision as planned.

PLEASE NOTE: Islanders are reminded that during the out-of-hours period they should call NHS 24 on 111.