

Medical centre scraps £100 fee for newborn examinations

Campaigners delighted as charge abolished at Queens Road practice

PARENTS have rejoiced at a decision by Queens Road Medical Practice to scrap the £100 charge for newborn baby examinations carried out by its GPs.

The practice, which also has responsibility for the Longrie Surgery, confirmed the checks – performed at the Princess Elizabeth Hospital just after birth or in the surgery a day or so after discharge – would now be free.

'It was felt it would make life easier for families at an already expensive time,' practice manager Chris Wakefield said.

At present, newborn babies are checked by a GP from the practice with which the mother is registered.

L'Aumone and St Sampson's Practice charges the normal consultation fee, £41.40, for the same baby examination.

The Healthcare Group, which includes Cobo, Rohais, St Martin's and the High Street surgeries, also said it charges parents the same fee for the baby checks as it would for a normal consultation.

This costs £53.80, but a £12 grant is refunded once the baby is registered – reducing the price to £41.80.

News of Queens Road Medical Practice's decision broke on the Guernseymums.gg

by Nicola Gibbons

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Facebook page – a support group that has actively campaigned against the fee along with the Maternity Services Liaison Committee. Around 80 people 'liked' the post and 24 women commented, speaking of their delight.

Guernseymums.gg co-founder Milly Dudley-Owen said the £100 charge was always an unpopular one.

'It was never really fully explained why it was that much. The practice's justification was that it was out of hours and more expensive than a regular surgery check-up.'

'Mums often felt that they were not given a choice if they wanted to have the check-up or not.'

'The visit would often be once you had just given birth and were not thinking about things like that – mums are probably still in a lot of pain and dazed at this time,' she said.

'We had spoken to the MSLC about the equity of the charge and made complaints in a personal capacity to the practice.'

'Therefore we are really delighted QRMP

has taken the decision to waive the charge and to listen to its patients.'

Ms Dudley-Owen believed the other two practices would now be put in a difficult position if they did not follow suit.

'I think they would be losing a lot of patients if they don't.'

The MSLC works as parents and professionals in partnership to 'improve the ex-

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perience of maternity service users in Guernsey.'

Chairwoman Bella Farrell said that, over the past few years, many new parents had been shocked at the charge.

'The MSLC has made the views of these new parents known to GPs.'

'It is delighted that Queens Road Medical Practice has taken this decision and hopes other practices will follow.'

Healthcare Group chairman Brian Parkin said examinations to determine the health of newborn babies have been conducted by general practitioners for many years.

'Fees as a whole will naturally be taken into account by patients when choosing a practice, however, taking one fee in isolation can of course give a misleading impression of overall costs.'

Islandhealth chairman Dr Ian Baxendale said: 'L'Aumone and St Sampson's Practice has always recognised the importance of visiting our patients after the birth of their baby and the skills and experience required for the newborn baby checks.'

'For this reason, we have never charged a visit fee but have charged a normal consultation fee.'

Regulator pleased to see variations in charges between island's GP surgeries

GUERNSEY'S regulator is 'pleased' to see variations in charges between doctors' surgeries after Queens Road Medical Practice decided to abolish its £100 new baby check fee.

While practice manager Chris Wakefield would not comment on whether the decision was a direct result of the new competition law, he said there had been 'limited scope for variation in pricing be-

tween the surgeries'.

Channel Islands Competition and Regulatory Authorities said it was not aware of the basis for the decision but it was clearly a welcome move from the perspective of new parents.

'We are pleased that we are beginning to see variations in charges between GP surgeries in Guernsey,' chief executive Andrew Riseley said.

'As we understand it, the surgeries in Guernsey have now ceased publication of recommended prices and have started to set their charges independently, as required by the Competition Ordinance.'

'Competition in medical services is always likely to operate in a different way to other sectors, because patients choose their GPs based on a range of factors and price may not be a decisive factor – al-

though Cicra is aware that GP consultation fees have been the source of some public concern.'

'We would hope to continue to see action from GP surgeries aimed at attracting new patients or keeping existing patients.'

Medical practices were warned last year that they could be fined under the competition law if they fixed prices.

The law was brought in last year.