

CRAWLEY DOWN HEALTH CENTRE

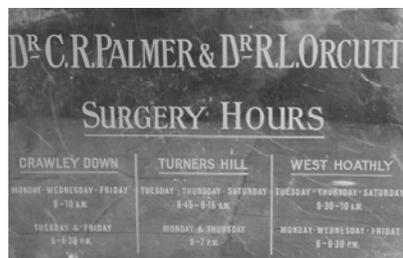
FIFTY, GOING ON SIXTY, YEARS YOUNG

Many things define a village community, the church, the school, local businesses and shops but most of all the villagers themselves. You could say that one of the things at its heart, bringing them all together, is its doctors and the health centre. I wanted to mark the ten years since the present Health Centre was opened with an article that charts how a village like ours has developed since the war, reflected by the changes in health provision.

After the war, Crawley Down had a population of less than 1,000. A railway line ran from East Grinstead to Three Bridges that stopped at Grange Road station, Crawley Down.

In the early sixties, Doctors Palmer and Orcutt set up a practice, renting the Rosery, a detached house in Hophurst Lane. The Police House was a few doors along. Marguerite Riley lived in the house with her husband Barry and baby son Jason. She started by generally looking after the place for the doctors but eventually became receptionist, secretary and dispenser, sometimes balancing Jason on her hip as she worked.

The front room was the waiting room, the dining room the doctors' surgery. There was no appointment system; you just waited your turn because you knew you would eventually get seen. Sometimes the patients spilled onto the hall and stairs. If someone came in with a sick child, you would let them jump the queue. There were two daily surgeries morning and evening and you could ring the doctors on a Saturday morning at the surgery. Once surgery was finished, they did the home visits. The phone would be put through to their houses, and they would be on call evenings and weekends. Their wives would answer the phone and take messages if they were out. The doctors would always leave a list of phone numbers of the home visits, or their neighbours, if they didn't have a phone. Dr Orcutt would al-



DR C.R. PALMER & DR R.L. ORCUTT		
SURGERY HOURS		
CRAWLEY DOWN	TURNERS HILL	WEST HOATHLY
MONDAY - WEDNESDAY - FRIDAY 9-10 AM	TUESDAY - THURSDAY - SATURDAY 9-10-11 AM	TUESDAY - THURSDAY - SATURDAY 9-10-11 AM
TUESDAY & FRIDAY 6-8-10 AM	MONDAY & THURSDAY 9-11 AM	MONDAY - WEDNESDAY - FRIDAY 9-10-11 AM



The Rosery

ways call in to Wheadons Removals at Snow Hill when he was out on house visits. He'd use their phone to call the surgery to pick up any new messages.

Babies were weighed by Gladys Rhodes at the Village Hall, with Peggy Holman and Shirley Donaldson assisting. Mums would take their big Silver Cross prams or pushchairs on the train or sometimes walk to the surgery in Crawley Down to get their babies vaccinated. Marg shared her fridge in the kitchen with the vaccines and medicines. Supplies for the dispensary were ordered on a daily basis from Dixons the chemist in East Grinstead and the doctors would pick them up on the way back from their daily visit to see patients who were in the Queen Vic. Ingrid Fisher and Valerie Gurney were the first two doctors to be trained at the surgery. The midwife lived in a house at the top of Sandy Lane. Sister Penrose, Penny, held ante-natal surgeries in the Village Hall. Dorothy Furnivall and Jean McLoughlin were district nurses/midwives for the surrounding community. The new Crawley Hospital opened in the early sixties and Crawley Down mums could go there to have their babies. There was a surgery in Turners Hill in the Free Church Hall and at West Hoathly in a garage at Gardenmead and later St Dunstons Chapel. Dr Orcutt also held a surgery at his house at Vinols Cross. During the bad winter of 62/63, Dr Orcutt slept on the sofa at the surgery as he couldn't get home.

By the end of the sixties the doctors realised they would have to look for bigger premises. Crawley Down was growing. New houses were built in Bricklands, Woodland Drive and Kiln Road after the brick works closed in the fifties, plus developments at Grange Road and Squires Close in the sixties.

The beginning of the 1970s saw great changes in Crawley Down and surrounding area. Gatwick and Crawley were expanding and demand for houses was rising. The railway was closed in 1967 during Beeching's cuts. The fields around Tiltwood House were sold to a developer, T&E Homes, who promised a new school and doctor's surgery in their package. There was also a lot of derelict land left over from the brickworks and the railway. So, you could say the doctors' prayers were answered. Provision was made for a purpose-built surgery at the top of Bowers Place, which in those days was an unmade-up road, managed by East Sussex Executive Council. It was made one way once the surgery was built.

The population of Crawley Down almost doubled overnight as the new estate reached completion around 1982. The new surgery could now accommodate a large dispensary run by Sylvia Billings and a team of three full time doctors, Dr Orcutt, Dr Palmer and Dr Clemens. When Dr Croucher came in 1982 Dr Orcutt and Dr Clemens were full time and she and Dr Palmer were part time;

the surgery was by now looking after 7000 patients. The Health Visitor, Val Fentiman, had her own office, as did the midwife and district nurses. There were no practice nurses. Peggy now weighed the babies in the Health Centre, assisted by Sally Coole and later Shirley Donaldson. Ante-natal classes were held there too, and friendships carved that still survive over 40 years later. Most Crawley Down Mums had their babies at Cuckfield Hospital. Appointments and prescriptions were written down in a book. Nanette Allen was on reception with Ann Jones and Mary Coomber and Marguerite was Practice Manager. Then came the advent of computers, Nanette remembers they were something you learnt as you went along. The day of the big storm in 1987 provided a big challenge with no electricity or water but the surgery opened up regardless.

An extension was built in 1984 to provide four consulting rooms, an office for a part time practice nurse and treatment room nurse, a staff room and more space for the health visitors. Dr Palmer retired fully in 1987 and Dr Adams replaced him. Dr Orcutt retired in 1989 and Dr Clifford replaced him. Dr Jefferies joined in 1994, when Dr Adams emigrated to Australia. Crawley Down Mums were now having their babies in the newly-built Princess Royal Hospital at Haywards Heath.

By 2005, the number of patients had increased only marginally to 7500 but medical practice had undergone many changes; changes in the needs and expectations of patients from the doctors, loss of extended family support, increases in preventative medicine and screening, work devolving from hospital to general practice, advances in medical treatments. The building itself needed replacing and the practice had outgrown it. It was decided to build a PFI (privately funded building); the doctors would lease back part of it and the Primary Care Trust the rest. Dr Clemens retired in 2005, Dr Croucher became full-time and Dr Mendes was taken on to prepare for the increased facilities. The portakabin era commenced!

The opening of the new building took place 10 years ago in November 2007. The opening was memorable for the lift breaking down, full of people. Jan Freeman remembers the services of the doctors were needed as someone collapsed in the lift while they awaited the fire brigade to rescue them. The doctors wanted the village involved so ran a competition among the local schoolchildren, asking them to draw pictures of 'what happens in a surgery'. The winner from each year group performed the opening ceremony.

In 2012 the government started an initiative that would give patients a voice in the running of their surgeries. Each practice was to have a Patients Participa-

tion Group. Our group, the Friends of CDHC, have bi-monthly meetings with Dr Jefferies and the Practice Manager and have set up a dedicated website and quarterly newsletter, as well as taking part in local and district meetings with the Clinical Commissioning Group and fund raising for items the surgery needs but are not covered in the NHS list.



The Surgery in 2018

Ten years down the line, Crawley Down Health Centre has 8,500 patients from this area and it is now about to undergo another big change. Dr Clifford is retiring after nearly 30 years, although he has promised to come back as a locum! The surgery has two partners, Dr Jefferies and Dr Osaba and 4 salaried part-time doctors. The partners employ 29 staff, headed by the practice manager. As well as the nurses and dispensers, members of the Primary Health Care Team, district nurses, midwives, dieticians, community psychiatric nurses see patients regularly at the premises. Appointments and prescriptions are no longer written down in a book. With the advance of computers, patients can if they wish make appointments, order repeat prescriptions online and have access to their medical records. The doctors are no longer on call at night and weekends; this is done by out of hours doctors. Their duties now include dealing with endless paper-work, including repeat prescriptions which take up more of their time.

Times have changed but the Health Centre is still a vital part of the village community that helps make Crawley Down a special place to live.

This article would not have been possible without the help of Marguerite Riley, Sylvia Billings, Nanette Allen, Janet Rhodes, Gillian Payne, Barbara Wheadon and Lesley Croucher. It has been a fascinating journey.

Caroline Custard, January 2018

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Crawley Down Health Centre is here: www.cdhc.co.uk

Friends of Crawley Down Health Centre is here: www.friendsofcdhc.co.uk