



“Every two months the organisation brings in local consultants, there is no promotion by the drug rep and we don't have to go anywhere

Dr Amanda Sutton (pictured)

### Lunch learning

- GPs like receiving high-quality training at the practice (and get a free lunch).
- Essentially Medical's concept is education for the GP, profile building for the consultant and access for the pharmaceutical company.
- Consultants can build relationships with local GPs.
- Drug companies get access to GPs who are rarely prepared to see them.

# Bring CPD sessions to the surgery

An education scheme brings consultants to GP surgeries for lunchtime talks, writes **Fiona Barr**

An organisation that brings consultants to practices in the London area has hit on a winning formula. Essentially Medical offers GPs and practice nurses the chance for local consultants to deliver free lunchtime education sessions. Pharmaceutical companies sponsor meetings and send a representative along but promotion is not part of the deal.

Essentially Medical claims this is a successful package because it enables GPs to meet and question the consultants they refer patients to and help consultants to build up their profile with local practices.

The meetings also enable pharmaceutical companies to support medical education in a format that is popular with those on the receiving end.

The concept was launched in North West London in 2004 and has expanded to cover six more areas in London. The firm has now delivered more than 300 educational meetings to over 50 practices and has also started to run some sessions for commissioning groups.

North London GP Dr Paul Blom, whose practice is in Golders Green, is a regular user of the service and estimated he and his partners have used Essentially Medical once every three months for the past two years.

'I find it increasingly difficult to get out to sessions during the day and, quite frankly, by the

end of the day I have had enough,' he says. 'The consultants come to us which is great. I like the informality of it over lunch which leads to a good exchange of ideas and information and I'd like to think it was a two-way thing.'

He adds that some speakers are better than others but that is always going to be the case.

#### GPs can suggest topics

A key component of the service is that only local consultants are offered to practices. This means the talks are given by the senior secondary care doctors most likely to be caring for the practice's own patients.

Practices are also free to suggest a topic that they want the consultant to address. Or they can turn the entire meeting over to a question-and-answer session. GPs also get the chance to discuss any particu-

lar problems with specific patients that they may have.

Evelyn Diamond, a former marketing manager for a private hospital in London, set up the firm. Consultants give their time free of charge. Ms Diamond explains that many are happy to take part to improve relations with local GPs, and potentially boost their private practice. There are now 100 consultants running sessions across London.

She adds: 'We are very strict in that we only take one consultant per specialty in each area as we don't want to play them off against each other. We normally start with about 12 consultants in an area so we can offer practices a choice of different specialties and then build it from there.'

All meetings conform to the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry's



Essentially Medical can organise training sessions at your practice

code of practice and each person who attends receives a certificate of participation.

#### Consultants not paid

For Dr Jyoti Sood, a GP at Newbury Park Health Centre in Essex, a key advantage of the service is that the hard work of organising educational sessions can be passed to someone else.

'A lot of my time used to be spent ringing reps, arranging food and arranging speakers. Essentially Medical has taken all that away so I can now use my time on other things.'

Mr Daryll Baker, a general and vascular surgeon at the Royal Free Hospital in North London helped Ms Diamond to formulate the original idea and has been running sessions at local practices since Essentially Medical began.

'The important thing is that it is locally based so I can go to practices around the Royal Free and Edgware where I work', he says. 'It's good to communicate with local GPs so that you get to know how different practices work and who people are.'

He added that he does not have a moral issue with the drug companies being involved because he is not paid by them.

Plans for the future include offering the service in other big cities across the UK, with Glasgow already on the hit list after an expression of interest from one of the city's consultants.

● For more details, contact Evelyn Diamond at (01923) 850225 or visit [www.essentiallymedical.co.uk](http://www.essentiallymedical.co.uk)

### Case study

Dr Amanda Sutton is the partner in charge of organising educational sessions at the Dukes Avenue Practice, North London and has used Essentially Medical every couple of months for over two years. 'It has been excellent. They bring in local consultants, there is no promotion by the drug rep and we don't have to go anywhere,' she says.

Dr Sutton says there is a large list of consultants the practice can choose from. Sometimes the doctors – five partners, two salaried doctors and two registrars – ask for a particular topic while on other occasions the consultant sets the agenda.

Both approaches have been very successful. The nursing team at the practice also joins the sessions and Dr Sutton says both doctors and nurses benefit from the opportunity to meet the local consultants who are taking care of their patients.