Chapter 2

Services Related to Patients

DOCTOR'S AVAILABILITY

The Contract specifies the amount of time that a general practitioner has available for patient consultations and of how patients will be informed of the time.

Why Introduced?

It appears that behind the reasoning was the belief that some doctors have not, in the past, been available to their patients for sufficient hours because of other professional commitments or non-professional activities outside of the practice. It was felt that perhaps general practice had become a part time occupation and that the NHS was not getting sufficient value for money.

It was believed that the traditional independent entrepreneurial status of a general practitioner was too free and without sufficient specified conditions for the paymasters.

It was also believed that the services of general practitioners, their availability and consulting hours were arranged more to suit the doctors than their patients.
SERVICES RELATED TO PATIENTS

Associated with such thinking have come demands for information to be given regarding the availability to patients of doctors and other members of the practice team. For example, details of appointment times and out of hours cover should be made public through leaflets. Implied also, is that patients or their representatives should be able to be involved in such matters.

What is in the New Contract?
It is expected that doctors should be available -

- on 5 days in a week, unless approval by the Family Practitioner Committee for 4 days by virtue of the doctor undertaking health related services on the unavailable day

- for not less than 26 hours in any week for consultations in the practice (this does not include travel time or other tasks) unless special arrangements for less have been made with the FPC

- for 42 weeks in any 12 month period