

Changes to practice boundaries from April 2012

As part of the agreement negotiated between GPC and NHS Employers for 2012/13, changes are being made to regulations from this April to allow practices to create 'outer boundaries'.

These changes have been introduced to help improve patient choice of practice and to amend the closed list regulations, but they are unrelated to the piloting of remote registration and consultation. Changes to practice boundary arrangements and the relaxing of the closed list regulations, as described below, are permanent and apply across England.

What changes are being made to practice boundaries?

The changes being made to regulations regarding practice boundaries really only formalise what many practices already do. From the end of this April, PCTs will be expected to work collaboratively with practices to establish new 'outer boundary' areas to help patients who move a short distance outside the current practice boundary to stay with their existing practice.

Do all practices have to create outer boundaries?

Where a GP practice already has a large boundary area it may not be appropriate to establish an outer boundary. This is recognised in the new regulations. However we would expect most practices to work with PCTs to specify an outer boundary – in some cases this may only be a matter of a few streets larger than the existing practice boundary.

Practices' new outer boundaries will be specified in their GMS contract or PMS agreement and should be advertised in practice leaflets and on websites. The information will also be made available on the NHS Choices website.

What impact will the new boundaries have on patients?

Existing patients who move into the outer boundary area of a GP practice and remain registered with that practice will be eligible for the normal range of services, including clinically necessary home visits. Practices will need to bear in mind the feasibility of home visits, and any possible impact on their patient population as a whole, when agreeing their outer boundary.

Guidance will acknowledge that for patients requiring very frequent home visits, it may be in their interests to register with a practice nearer their home rather than remaining with their former practice simply because they live in its outer boundary area.