

PRESS RELEASE



For immediate release: Friday 3rd December, 2010

DOCTORS ADVISED TO TAKE COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO HOME VISITS DURING COLD SNAP

Doctors must make every reasonable effort to make home visits to ill patients during the current adverse weather conditions.

But the UK-wide medical defence organisation MDDUS says GPs must use their common sense to avoid creating further problems by becoming snowbound or having an accident while travelling.

A number of GPs have been calling MDDUS for advice about their obligations to visit patients as they face heavy snow falls, and persistent difficulties in driving due to the extreme condition.

Dr Jim Rodger, head of professional services at MDDUS, says: "It is essentially the application of common sense rather than any legal or service requirements.

"Patients who request house calls should be asked what the conditions of the roads are like in their immediate area. Main roads are being cleared but side roads, where people live, are not.

"It would be wrong for doctors or nurses to set off in adverse conditions then become stuck in snow or have an accident, and thereby render themselves 'out of action'.

"It is much more sensible to remain in the surgery and encourage patients to attend the surgery.

"We have had reports from GPs in badly affected parts of the country who have heroically trudged through the snow for an hour in order to see patients."

MDDUS stresses however that there will always be emergencies. Rodger adds: "It is vital for doctors to ensure they gather as much information as possible about the patient's previous medical condition and their present difficulties to allow them to decide what is in the patient's best interests.

"It may well be that ordering an ambulance, either 'blue light' or otherwise might be the best and quickest option depending on the patient's symptoms - assuming an ambulance can get through."

As the travel chaos continues Rodger concludes: "Each practice will have to make plans as to what to do in these circumstances. It may be that one or more of the doctors has a 4x4 vehicle and can actually attend non-emergency but urgent house calls.

"The general advice is to gather as much information as possible, decide on urgency, act in the patient's best interests and apply common sense."

Ends

For further information contact Colin Calder on 0141 616 2677 or 07850 510881.

Note to editors

MDDUS (Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland) is a medical and dental defence organisation providing access to professional indemnity and expert medico- and dento-legal advice for doctors, dentists and other healthcare professionals throughout the UK. For further information on MDDUS go to www.mddus.com.