

Free under-six GP care leads to big rise in visits

THE introduction of free GP care for under-sixes has led to a significant increase of more than a quarter in the number of times children visit their GP.

In 2015, all 440,000 children under six were granted free access to GP services, regardless of their family income.

A new study revealed yesterday that since the scheme's introduction, the number of GP daytime visits by under-sixes increased by 29%, while out-of-hours visits rose by 26%.

The study was carried out by researchers at Trinity College Dublin, who examined visitation data from eight GP practices in north Dublin and the local out-of-hours service,

By Lisa O'Donnell

Northdoc. While there was a rise in both daytime and out-of-hours visits across all age groups, children under six made up 45% of additional daytime GP visits and 73% of extra out-of-hours services visits.

The leading author of the study, Dr Michael O'Callaghan, said was no surprise GP services were used more often when free. 'This study shows conclusively that large numbers of additional children availed of GP services and availed of these services more often once they gained free access,' Dr O'Callaghan said. 'Our study also demonstrates

the knock-on effect of the under-sixes contract in the out-of-hours service, which experienced a disproportionately large spike in numbers of children under six attending.'

'As we've no reason to believe the cohort experienced more ill health in the second year of the study, we can conclude the large increases were simply as a result of the introduction of free GP care.'

Commenting on the findings, Professor Tom O'Dowd of Trinity said: 'This study shows that workload planning is required when any changes to GP access are made. If not, access to frontline GP services will be undermined for everyone.'

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Life is precious, and the greatest gift we can share is happiness...

NELLY lived on a quiet road where people kept mostly to themselves. She was an elderly lady with no children. Her husband had long ago ascended to the angels.

Nelly was small with white hair tied in a bun. She always wore a dress with her favourite red cardigan. But the most notable thing about Nelly was her big smile.

Nelly's little house was shaded by a large oak tree. Inside, it was clean, comfortable and decorated with family photos and memorabilia. Nelly loved to gaze back across the years, loved to remember her husband and parents as they once were.

Each day, Nelly woke early, made herself a cup of tea and sat in the garden listening to the birdsong. She spoke to the birds, to the flowers and the trees as though they were her children.

Her little patch of creation was a sanctuary of love.

Nelly regretted nothing nor wished for anything. When she looked back, she did not see the grief and sadness which comes to every life. All she saw were the happy times, those golden moments which also bless each human life.

The road slept as Nelly ventured out each morning. In the hush, she moved from house to house doing neighbourly things. She would, for example, retrieve the morning newspaper from a lawn and place it on the doorstep.

She would quietly roll any stray bins into their owners' driveways. She would always ensure that the milk was under the porch and not exposed to the elements. She did this, not for any praise, but simply because that is what good neighbours do.

Wherever Nelly went, she bid people a happy day. She was gentle, caring and kind to everyone she met, but most especially children.

Nelly believed all children respond well to love, and that to starve a child of love is to deny them a happy future.

In her quiet, humble way, Nelly did her shopping. If anyone wished to chat, she made time to do so. Otherwise, she left people to their own devices, for she always believed that those with troubled hearts need their space.

Nelly had no great philosophy of life, but she believed that keeping

it simple is the key to contentment. 'Having enough is all you need; having more is too much.' Those were her father's words and she never ceased to live by them.

In her spare time, she would visit her elderly friends. At other times, she would tend to her husband's grave, doing what she could to maintain adjoining plots.

Still, Nelly never forgot her mother reciting Charles Dickens: 'Perhaps the mourners learn to look to the blue sky by day, and to the stars by night, and to think that the dead are there, and not in graves.'

Nelly believed the world was a gift, that life was precious, and that the only thing we can leave behind of any lasting worth is happiness.

You might be without material wealth, but when you share a little happiness you give away something whose value cannot decline.

For it is this, and only this, which makes the passage of life easier to traverse.

Nelly never criticised others, nor did she make judgments. She sought only to forgive and empathise. For what good can come from dragging people down, when the answer to their problems is to lift them up?

Nelly felt that the role of each person is to be a guardian angel for those whose lives we touch. Looking out for people, thinking of them, or even saying a little prayer for them - all these are ways to help and love and care. And who is so self-sufficient that they don't need a helping hand, however remote or invisible?

ONE day, the sun rose on a quiet road where people kept mostly to themselves. The birds sang, the trees swayed, and the dogs barked in the morning heat. It was summertime and the residents of that road were preparing for the day ahead.

'That's strange,' said one man looking out his window, 'the papers are lying on the lawn.' His neighbour was already out dragging in his bins from the roadside. Another person, thinking her milk had not been delivered, eventually discovered it in the full glare of the sun.

For the first time ever, weeds gathered on a grave nearby. They grew and grew but nobody seemed to notice.

Above it all, the blue sky and the stars shone brightly.

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—

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