

Response to Healthwatch

Capacity

Both County and Royal Stoke University hospitals have a record number of patients who are medically fit for discharge and unable to leave hospital as they are waiting for community based services. There is absolute commitment from the Clinical Commissioners, Local Authorities and Community Trust who are working with the Trust to tackle this problem. Royal Stoke Hospital has also experienced a 10% growth in ambulance activity (County has seen a modest reduction) which has resulted in a growth in emergency admissions. To support patients to seek the right support for medical attention the Trust has introduced an app to inform patients of waiting times in Accident & Emergency departments and walk in centers. The commitment made by all partners has been to remove all formal waits from both hospitals by the end of September 2016.

Our Clinical Commissioners have been supporting us with a number of initiatives to speed up elective care. These include the transfer of appropriate patients to other providers at source of referral and moving more elective services to County hospital. There are also plans to move more operating lists to County hospital, particularly in Orthopaedics. UHNM has engaged with a private provider to support the opening of additional elective orthopaedic theatres at the Royal Stoke site to support improved waiting times in Orthopaedic surgery.

There is a national shortage of registered nurses and the impact of this is seen in most hospitals across the Country. UHNM has worked hard to recruit through a number of initiatives including the implementation of a number of schemes with the local universities and other higher educational establishments which will ultimately result in a larger pool of nurses locally. Since integration the vacancy factor has continued to reduce and there is good evidence that new nurses are being attracted to the Trust. This has resulted in a reducing reliance on nurse agency staff and the Trust has successfully recruited to its own nurse bank which now means that there is no agency usage of nursing assistants at the County and Royal Sites. Where the use of agency staff is unavoidable we book the same nurses to attend wherever possible so they are aware of the Trusts Policy and procedures and this consistency has improved team work.

Of course UHNM is looking to eliminate the reliance on agency staff however, there is no evidence that quality indicators have been adversely affected by the use of agency staff, and indicators such as pressure ulcers, falls, complaints etc. are monitored at ward level on a continual basis. The CQC report also rated the care as good at the County site.

Transport & Parking

The Trust accepts that car parking capacity, especially at Royal Stoke is a concern at busy times. The Trust currently has 1081 spaces available at Royal Stoke for patients and visitors. Whilst this a higher capacity than many large acute hospitals, we are currently looking at creating additional capacity, for staff, patients and visitors close to the main site.

To ensure the running cost of providing car parking services is not subsidised from monies that would otherwise have been used in the provision of direct patient care UHNM, like many other NHS Trusts, took the difficult decision to introduce car-parking charges for patients, visitors and staff. The charges were determined by looking at other Hospital Trusts, Local Authorities and private car parking vendors in the immediate area.

The Trust has taken into account a number of comments which have been received from our patients and visitors. In response we have significantly expanded the number and range of car

parking tariffs that are now available, to offer greater accessibility and flexibility of car parking arrangements and charging options.

Concessionary parking permits are available for frequent outpatients patients or their relatives, who attend hospital on 3 or more occasions each week and for long stay in-patients or their relatives when the patient is in hospital for 2 weeks or more. Exemption from car parking charges permits are available for the Renal Unit (Dialysis patients), Cancer Centre, Critical Care Unit, High Dependency Unit, Maternity & Specialist Clinical Areas, for patients or one named relative.

The Trust accepts that clinic overruns can cause concerns to patients. At County, this can be alleviated by explaining the situation at the car parking office where parking charges will be reduced if the delay was due to clinic overruns etc. At Stoke there is a similar process that outpatient's clinics are aware of to ensure the patient is not overcharged or inconvenienced. This process is understood by all Wards & Departments, and has again been communicated to all areas within the last three months.

Details of the NHS Low Income scheme are included within the Trusts website, and within the Outpatient departments. Further information is also available from the Trusts Cashiers departments.

The County/Stoke link bus service operates between Royal Stoke and County Hospitals 7 days per week/365 days per year. On Monday to Friday it operates two buses between 6 am and 10 pm, leaving both sites on the hour. On weekends & Bank Holidays one bus operates between 8 am and 6 pm, leaving both sites every two hours. In addition, departments have the ability to request a taxi for staff working outside of the link bus timetable if required and approved.

A staff survey identified that 73% of the staff who use the link bus were satisfied with the service. The Trust accepts however, that, with the large variance in shift patterns, it is not possible to offer a totally conveniently timed service for all staff. Further surveys will be carried out to ensure that the service remains best placed for the majority of users.

Pre-booking of the link bus service is required to ensure sufficient capacity on the service is available. Information is provided to the public at both sites by posters in reception areas and leaflets available within the PALS offices. This information is also included within the Trusts Website and on the site maps supplied with all patient appointment letters. Patients and visitors can travel on the service without pre-booking, but only if seats are available at that time. Pre-booked travellers will of course be given priority.

The link bus drop off and collection locations on both sites are at the approved public transport bus stops and all link buses park here prior to the departure time. These are located within 50 metres of both hospital entrances and are the nearest practical and safe location to allow the buses to stop safely.

The tariff set for use of the link bus was originally set to offer a reduced cost when compared against other appropriate means of transport between the two sites. The tariff has not been increased since the service began in October 2014. It should also be noted that if patients and visitors are using the service as "Park & Ride", then concessionary car parking permits are available at both sites for frequent users.

Communication

The Trust is always looking for new ways to improve communication with both staff and patients and has introduced a number of initiatives to support this:

The Trust website, information maps and sign posts are being reviewed by the Hospital User Group to gain service user feedback on its accessibility and the usefulness of the information available. The Patient Experience and Facilities team have also developed links with Keele University to explore how well patients can navigate around the hospital using the existing website, information maps and sign posts. The feedback from these will support changes from the perspective of patients who are new to the Royal Stoke and County sites.

In response to feedback that our patients want to be more involved in their care and receive more information to support this UHNM has launched an "It's Ok to ask" campaign. Staff are wearing "It's OK to ask" badges, information banners are situated around the Trust and bookmarks are available for patients. These have all been designed to encourage patients to ask questions and not be embarrassed to say if they don't understand.

There have been a number of "In your shoes" focus groups for staff, patients and carers to determine what it feels like to be a patient of UHNM or a member of staff working in the organisation. The aim is to gather suggestions for improving information sharing from both a staff and a service user perspective and identify what good looks like. These focus groups will continue throughout the year.

A new IT system is being implemented by the Trust in November 2016 to support access of health records across both sites.

Details of available transport modes are provided to the public at both sites by leaflets available within the PALS offices. The information is included within the Trusts Website, and is also included within the site maps, supplied with all patient appointment letters. At RSUH, this information is also available via Infopoint (located within the main atrium) whilst a Taxi phone is available at County. Car Parking attendants are available at both sites to offer advice regarding appropriate car parking availability. At County this is by utilising the call button at all car park entrances, whilst at Stoke this is provided by the Car Parking attendants stationed within major car parking areas, and by the main hospital entrance drop off areas. At both sites, patient/visitor drop off areas are provided by the main hospital entrances where volunteers are available to assist patients in getting safely to their point of care.