



Kent Local Medical Committee

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A brief overview from Dr Robert Blundell on the five Community Hospitals across West Kent with a more detailed report on Hawkhurst Hospital, a Community Hospital close to his practice.

West Kent Community Hospitals

There are Five Community Hospitals.

Currently they are run by West Kent Community Trust. This trust separated from West Kent PCT in December of 2009.

The hospitals have different backgrounds.

Some such as Sevenoaks resulted from the closure of District General Hospital. Others were donated to communities by wealthy benefactors prior to the NHS maintained by their communities and adopted by the NHS subsequent to its formation in 1948.

The Community Hospitals run by West Kent Community Trust are:

Dartford
Edenbridge
Sevenoaks
Tonbridge
Hawkhurst

These communities have different needs depending upon their geographical location and ease of access to District General Hospitals, nursing homes, specialised community nursing services and hospices etc.

They were generally staffed by local GPs who looked after their own registered NHS patients. 'Low tech' medical conditions requiring admission were admitted and step down care was provided which allowed patients to be rehabilitated closer to their homes thus facilitating friend and family visits.

The present Management of the Community Hospitals has sought to apply universal admission criteria to the Community Hospitals two years ago. Some GPs would argue that these criteria were not flexible enough as they did not adequately consider the geographical location or specific needs of the communities. The present managing trust has also sought to ensure full occupancy of the hospitals Patients from outside of the traditional catchment areas have been seen for re-cooperation in Community hospitals distant from their homes. Furthermore this policy has on occasions led to beds not being available in appropriate community hospitals at the requisite time. Thus patients from Hawkhurst have found themselves rehabilitated in Edenbridge or Crowborough and /or Tonbridge patients sent to Sevenoaks and vice-versa. This policy is at the very least 'not green' as it engenders long journeys for

friends and relatives when visiting and similarly it logistically makes pre discharge occupational home visits very difficult.

Hawkhurst Hospital

This is the most isolated of the West Kent Community Hospitals. It is about three miles from the East Sussex border and located roughly at the intersection of the midway points of the MTW Hospitals with The Conquest in Hastings, and similarly between The William Harvey Hospital Ashford and East Bourne Hospital. Hawkhurst Hospital was extended at the end of the 1990s and now has 25 Beds.

There are no nursing homes within 8 miles of Hawkhurst and in the 1990's Hawkhurst Hospital had 'Lying In' postnatal beds and afforded respite and terminal care facilities to the community. The lying-in beds have gone and the role of the hospital in affording respite and terminal care has been disputed. This has led to patients from Hawkhurst being discharged from Hawkhurst Hospital to a Nursing Home nine miles away in Staplehurst for terminal care.

Hawkhurst Hospital has a Physiotherapy Department and an outpatient Consulting Room in what was the Matron's Bungalow. This facilitated consultations with visiting Consultant Specialists from both Hastings and the MTW Hospitals. Unfortunately inadequate facilities and arguably unsympathetic hospital management have caused many of these specialists to withdraw their services. Similarly in the past two years five of the seven GP Practices which had admitting rights have resigned from the Staff of the Hospital. One of the remaining Practices has a contract to supervise. At a recent open Board Meeting the Community Trust Board did express interest in redeveloping the Out-Patient Dept. in Hawkhurst and considering offering inpatient services to those living close to the Hospital in East Sussex.

Dr Robert Blundell
Vice-Chair Kent Local Medical Committee
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