

Briefing on the Chemotherapy Services in East Kent Kent Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

September 2015

East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust delivers Chemotherapy services from its three acute sites (Celia Blakey Day Unit at Ashford, Cathedral Day Unit, Canterbury and Viking Day Unit, Margate); we also have a Chemotherapy Mobile Unit which delivers services at Herne Bay, Dover and Hythe.

In the early part of June this year the Celia Blakey unit at Ashford reported an emerging staffing risk which would see the unit down to 50% of its permanent workforce, by the end of June, due to a mixture of Vacancy, Maternity leave and long term sickness. This presented a patient safety issue and required the service to consider how it would safely continue to deliver care to patients. A number of options were considered and discussed with the Divisional Leadership Team and Executives. There were two clear options one involved agency staff and the other to extend the hours at Canterbury Cathedral day Unit and use the Chemotherapy Mobile unit on the Ashford site for appropriate chemotherapy regimens for a temporary period.

The agency option was very expensive and required us to use off framework agency staff, due to the specialism of this service. The estimated cost for twelve months was in the region of £660k. Furthermore, it is not recommended to run services on such high agency staffing and therefore, the alternative option to provide care from the mobile unit at Ashford 3 days a week and to move those who needed more complex care to Canterbury, was considered the better option. All other non-chemotherapy appointments remain at the William Harvey Hospital if more convenient for patients.

The patient appointments were moved to Canterbury on the 6th July. The Cathedral Day Unit has extended its hours of opening to 9pm Monday to Friday and is opening on a Saturday. Alongside this the Chemotherapy Mobile Unit is available at Ashford three days per week. These arrangements are expected to remain in place for between nine and twelve months. All new chemotherapy appointments remain within the unit on the William Harvey Hospital site.

It is very unusual for our chemotherapy units to recruit chemotherapy competent staff, as there is a national shortage. Normally we recruit band 5 registered nurses and train them, the training takes twelve months. A programme of recruitment has started and we are planning to be back in the Celia Blakey unit within the year. In

addition to recruiting new staff we are in the process of contacting staff who have left our chemotherapy services in the last twelve months. The aim is to find out why they left and could we have done anything differently to have encouraged them to stay. We are also benchmarking ourselves against other Trusts in Kent, Medway and London to establish what grades chemotherapy trained staff are recruited in order to make us a competitive employer.

We have tried to communicate with all concerned and involved in the service. We wrote to and rang patients before we introduced the move and have used media, our CCG and MP's to share the message widely. To support patients we have shared the telephone contact details for the Cancer Care Line to allow them access to our staff, who can support or signpost their concerns.

There had been discussion taking place within the organisation around moving some services to support emergency care at William Harvey and the Celia Blakey Unit, incorporating, chemotherapy, ambulatory and outpatient care were part of the discussion. The Trusts financial position has meant that such plans are currently not being considered and Chemotherapy services will return to the Celia Blakey Unit once our staffing levels are appropriate.