

Emergency Care whole-system improvement plan

1. Background

- 1.1 The NHS in east Kent is committed to improving the A&E 4 hour performance standard (the waiting time for patients to be seen, treated and admitted to a hospital bed or discharged).
- 1.2 All patients are triaged on arrival and the most critically ill patients are prioritised. However waiting in an emergency department for a long time is not the standard we want for any of our patients. We are addressing this as a matter of urgency as a whole health system through an improvement plan, which includes a number of immediate actions, as well as medium and longer-term strategies, to ensure there is improvement now and that progress is sustained up to and throughout winter.
- 1.3 Staff are working extremely hard to provide good care for patients. The Trust and CCGs are carefully monitoring services to ensure that patients are receiving good, safe standards of care, despite the pressure the departments are under.

2. The Improvement Plan

- 2.1 The NHS in east Kent is delivering a whole system emergency care improvement plan. It was launched on 26 September 2017 and contains immediate actions (within 4 weeks), medium (by December) and longer-terms plans, to ensure that progress is sustained.
- 2.2 The plan focuses on:
 - Admission avoidance - ensuring that patients have access to appropriate support in primary and community care and attend A&E only when emergency treatment is necessary.
 - Decongesting the emergency departments to make the experience for patients more comfortable and safe and make it easier for them to be seen and treated. This includes an £800,000 investment to improve our environment and facilities to increase the space in the departments and allow patients to be directed to the most appropriate service including a GP on site.
 - Improving patient flow within and out of our hospitals, including the introduction of an electronic bed management system; ensuring patient discharges are planned well in advance and patients are discharged with appropriate packages of support as soon as they are ready to leave hospital and carrying out assessments in the most appropriate place where patients are no longer receiving acute hospital treatment.
 - Recruiting substantively and increasing our workforce, including extending services like access to therapists and a 7-day cardiac catheter laboratory for routine procedures so they can be discharged without unnecessary delay.
 - Communicating to the public appropriate alternatives to A&E and prevention. This includes providing clear information to the public about how they can use alternatives such as minor injury units for faster care, when it's not an emergency and how to stay well through winter by having the flu vaccine and getting early advice from your GP and pharmacy.
- 2.3 A staff-led, 12 week, rapid improvement programme, to kick start improved flow throughout the hospital, has resulted in steady week-on-week improvement in the 4 hour performance standard.

2.4 Last week East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust averaged 80% compliance against the four-hour standard. This is compared to 70% for September.

2.5 The Trust is aiming to continue on this trajectory of improvement including an above 80% performance for the whole month of December.

3. Recruitment

3.1 One of the challenges in getting patients seen quickly, is having the right workforce available 24/7. This remains a challenge for the NHS nationally. The Trust is still covering a high percentage of vacant posts with temporary staff and continues to face peaks in patient attendance at certain times of the day and week.

3.2 The Trust continues to recruit more doctors to work in all of our hospitals and has had some success in recruiting. In the last year the Trust advertised for 74 different consultant roles and recruited 55 new consultant doctors, including geriatricians, A&E and cardiac doctors, and specialist surgeons. It is also out to advert for 15 more doctors including A&E, heart, respiratory, stroke, diabetes, acute medicine and geriatrics.

3.3 The Trust has also recruited ten permanent middle grade doctors to work in our A&E departments, six have started and four are joining over the next few months. We have seven more in the pipeline, subject to clearances. There are still 10 consultant vacancies in acute and speciality medicine. We are actively recruiting to nursing posts and have successfully recruited to increased Emergency Nurse Practitioner posts to improve the service we provide for patients attending with minor injuries. We are exploring alternative roles and have recently recruited healthcare assistants to assist the nursing team in providing comfort care to our patients.

4. Long-term sustainability

4.1 We urgently need to move to a more sustainable way of providing hospital care in the future, with more capacity across health and social care locally and where patients are cared for in the right place at the right time, whether that's in a hospital bed, in a community setting or at home. The NHS in east Kent and social care partners across the whole system want to introduce a model of care that is best suited to deliver local care, avoid people coming to A&E when there is a more appropriate alternative and manage long-term conditions effectively.

4.2 East Kent's clinical strategy, once implemented following public consultation, is key to long-term improvement, providing sustainable services and improving 4-hour and other performance. The strategy will deliver more local care options, manageable rotas, co-location of specialist services and teams and certainly for staff, making east Kent a more attractive place to work.

4.3 This model of care will include capital investment to provide modern and more spacious A&E facilities as the current departments are too small and are badly designed in terms of patient flow. National modelling of patient numbers, resources and our ability to recruit sufficient staff, means that there cannot be three A&E departments in east Kent.

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