

Kent Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Acute Stroke Services Update

September 2020

Situation:

The acute stroke service provided by Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust (MTW) was transferred from Pembury Hospital in Tunbridge Wells to Maidstone Hospital in a temporary emergency move in October 2019. The case for change was presented to the HOSC meeting in July 2020.

The acute stroke service provided by Medway Foundation NHS Trust (MFT) was transferred to Maidstone Hospital and Darent Valley Hospital in a temporary emergency move in July 2020. The case for change was presented the Medway HASC in June 2020.

In both cases the temporary changes were made to ensure patient safety related to the availability of the workforce, specifically a lack of specialist stroke nurses.

This paper provides an update on the current situation for acute stroke services in North, West Kent and Medway.

Background:

A review of the provision of acute stroke services in Kent and Medway commenced at the end of 2014 and in February 2019 the Joint Committee of CCGs approved a Decision Making Business Case to support the implementation of three Hyper Acute and Acute Stroke Units (HASUs) in Ashford, Maidstone and Dartford. This decision was challenged via two Judicial Reviews and a referral to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. These challenges have resulted in a significantly extended timeline for implementation of the HASUs which is now pushed back from the original timeline of April 2020 to at least 2021. The current position is that the Judicial Reviews were heard and found in favour of the NHS. Since then two parties requested the right to appeal and we await feedback from the Secretary of State on the outcome of the referral from Medway Council and are not able to confirm an implementation date for HASUs across Kent and Medway until this is received.

We have always recognised that the loss of key staff from stroke units which will not become HASUs is a significant risk to the services in those units. We have also recognised the ongoing uncertainty over the location of acute stroke services for all stroke staff is a risk given that our bordering counties have all implemented HASUs. Fragility of acute stroke services and their ability to meet national clinical quality standards related to staffing remains one of the key drivers for change.

Assessment:

In both instances providers informed the K&M Stroke Network of their concerns for the ongoing safety of their acute stroke services. Options to support the services to remain in place were considered by both the individual organisations and also the K&M Stroke Clinical Reference Group. A range of options were considered, including support from other trusts however staff numbers were not adequate to do this safely without compromising all acute stroke services. Providers demonstrated they had endeavored to recruit both substantively and via agencies however this had proved unsuccessful.

When the Tunbridge Wells service was temporarily moved to Maidstone Hospital estate space was made available next to the Stroke Unit to accommodate the additional patients. In addition and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Maidstone cleared capacity on its acute stroke unit by transferring stable rehabilitation patients to the nearby KIMS Hospital for ongoing management. That meant that the site had the capacity to take on the proportion of Medway patients (approximately 80%) for whom Maidstone is their second closest stroke unit (based on journey times). Darent Valley clinical staff was able to support the transfer of activity for the remaining 20% of MFT patients.

Update:

The Tunbridge Wells acute stroke activity was transferred in October 2019 and the Medway activity in July 2020. Both transfers were supported by the K&M Stroke Network. We are not aware of any serious issues related to either temporary move and operational issues are managed as they arise. There is an issues log and the outstanding issues relate predominantly to information technology/information governance and access to the different providers imaging patient information systems. There is a dedicated meeting to resolve these issues taking place on 1st September.

Access to non-acute stroke services and rehabilitation for Medway and Swale patients remains in place and unchanged.

Historically rehabilitation for Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells patients has been delivered at Maidstone Hospital however, in response to Covid 19, this was temporarily moved to KIMS Hospital in Maidstone. This arrangement has now ended and service has returned to Maidstone Hospital. In line with the agreed model of care for rehabilitation we are working with community providers and expect to have some community provision in place by October 2020 with a longer term plan to increase that provision to the levels required.

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