

North Cheshire Hospitals

NHS Trust

October 25 2006

Dear Colleague

Ref: Improving Services at Halton General and Warrington Hospitals

I am writing to inform you that changes aimed at improving care to our patients are now underway at Halton General and Warrington Hospitals.

The moves, which are very much in line with national policies, are part of the first phase of a £15m package of investments in hospital services. These were approved by the Trust Board in July, following the **Better care, sustainable services** public consultation. As you will recall, the consultation sought the views of local people on a range of proposed changes to services at our hospitals, both of which currently deliver emergency medical care as well as planned surgery.

All too often planned operations have to be cancelled owing to the pressure on beds and/or theatres, which naturally causes unnecessary distress and inconvenience to patients and their families.

The changes that are now taking place across the Trust to separate planned surgery from emergency medical care are aimed at meeting patients' needs and ensuring safe, high quality, affordable care that will last for the next 10 years and beyond. They are also about improving care particularly for emergency medical, cancer, heart and stroke patients and ensuring that everyone receives the right level of specialist care, treatment and support.

Central to the changes is the development of Halton General Hospital as a centre of excellence for planned inpatient and daycase operations and Warrington Hospital as a centre of excellence for emergency medical care.

Between now and the end of December, Halton is gradually phasing out emergency medical care and transferring its five medical wards to Warrington Hospital. By the end of December all patients with chest pain or other serious medical conditions will be treated at Warrington, which will require the reorganisation of a number of wards and a theatre

In addition, we are developing a pioneering, 64 bedded Emergency Management Unit at Warrington, designed to speed up diagnosis and treatment by enabling patients to be seen at an early stage by a consultant.

Halton will concentrate on treating patients who have been seen by a doctor in an outpatient clinic and have been assessed as needing a planned, urgent or routine operation.

A new modular theatre will be opened at Halton for the increased number of patients undergoing planned surgery there and a ward, which has been closed for some time, will be re-opened to support the theatre.

The majority of Halton patients will not be affected by these changes as nine out of 10 visits to the hospital are for minor injuries, outpatients or daycase surgery.

The Minor Injuries Unit at Halton is being retained and will continue to be available between 9am and 10pm, Monday to Sunday.

Halton General Hospital will continue to admit patients with an urgent medical problem **but only if they have been referred by a GP first – and only until December.**

An Urgent Access Unit will be opened in December for GPs wanting an urgent medical opinion between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

We are also setting up a Programmed Investigation Unit at Halton for routine, but vital diagnostic tests (e.g. x-rays to take pictures of the bowel), which will assist in determining treatment. Patients may need to be admitted to a bed before and/or afterwards. These diagnostic services are currently provided at Warrington and Halton. Patients who need a bed recover on general wards, spread across both hospitals. The new service will help ensure that routine tests are no longer cancelled because of pressure from emergency admissions.

We appreciate that transport issues have been a major concern for many people, which is why we have been working closely with colleagues from Halton and Warrington Borough Councils, local bus providers and staff, patient and community representatives on these important matters.

I am pleased to report that a shuttle bus for patients, visitors and staff will be up and running between Halton and Warrington Hospitals by mid-November. It will drop off and pick up from a designated point at both hospitals and will operate from 6.40 am to 21.15 pm with 11 journeys each way in between these times. This will ensure coverage of all the key shift changes and visiting times. We are making every effort to ensure the service will be accessible to all, regardless of any physical disability.

A co-ordinated publicity campaign is planned to advertise the availability of the new shuttle bus service and to raise awareness of existing public and community transport links between the two hospitals. The possibility of providing real time bus information in the front entrances to both hospitals is also being investigated with borough council colleagues.

In addition, we are working collaboratively with borough council colleagues and local bus providers to examine the feasibility of an interchangeable 'hospital bus ticket'.

Finally, for your information, 50,000 information flyers, outlining the key changes currently taking place at both hospitals, are currently being distributed through voluntary organisations and condition specific groups to their members. Flyers are also being made available in hospital and community clinics and reception areas, GP surgeries, libraries and local authority information points.

I should like to record my thanks, on behalf of the Trust, to everyone who has kindly agreed to assist in the distribution of this important information for patients.

If you would like further information of any of the changes outlined in this letter may I suggest that you:

visit: www.northcheshirehospitals.nhs.uk
e-mail: project.director@nch.nhs.uk
call: comments line (for non-urgent comments) on
01925 662139 (regularly monitored answerphone)
write to: Mark Ogden-Meade, Project Director,
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Warrington WA5 1QG

Yours sincerely

Catherine Beardshaw
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