

14 June 2017

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Dear Colleague

Care Quality Commission report following inspection of Weston Area Health NHS Trust in February and March 2017, and temporary closure of Weston General Hospital A&E overnight from 4 July 2017

We are writing to let you know that the Care Quality Commission is today publishing its report following its inspection of Weston General Hospital in February and March this year. As you may know, the CQC inspected the hospital in August 2015, and while it acknowledges some improvements since then, our overall rating remains 'requires improvement'.

We are pleased that the CQC recognises that we have made improvements since our last inspection, due to the efforts of our hard-working staff. In particular, the inspectors found that our surgery and critical care services are now providing good all-round care to our patients. And the CQC rated our staff as 'good' for caring in all the areas they inspected. Across our ten services we now have seven rated as 'good' by the CQC, and one as 'outstanding'. But we know we still have some way to go to make sure all our patients get the best possible care across all services all of the time and fully accept the findings of the CQC report.

We are putting in place a comprehensive improvement plan, and have already started making the changes. For example, by improving our systems for admitting and discharging patients; working with local GPs so they can refer and admit patients directly to hospital for urgent care without coming through A&E; and partnering with a neighbouring Trust to share consultant expertise, clinical supervision and training.

However, one area of continued concern – emergency and urgent care services - was rated 'inadequate' by the CQC. As you are aware, the service has historic and ongoing issues, particularly around recruiting and retaining permanent doctors within the team. The CQC wants to see significant changes, and this endorses the view of our Board.

We agree with the CQC that our urgent and emergency care services are not sustainable in the way they are currently organised. Our A&E has been fragile for several years. We have severe challenges with recruiting and retaining senior doctors to staff our A&E department 24 hours and day, seven days a week, and now need to find new ways to address this.



Chairman: Grahame Paine Chief Executive: James Rimmer

An Associated Teaching Hospital of the University of Bristol

We are at risk of falling short of providing safe levels of staffing in our A&E department at night. Our staff have worked incredibly hard to shore-up the department, but despite significant efforts we just can't recruit enough permanent doctors and are very dependent on temporary and locum staff. That isn't sustainable for such a highly specialist clinical team and poses an intractable problem for the Trust.

So, today we are also announcing that we will be temporarily closing our A&E at Weston overnight from Tuesday 4 July 2017, between 10pm and 8am, because we can't provide safe staffing levels overnight from then. This is not an easy decision to make, but patient safety is our number one priority.

We would like to emphasise that this decision is nothing to do with the clinical practice or competence of our A&E staff, who continue to do an excellent job. It is solely due to needing the right staffing levels to ensure we can provide a safe service throughout the night. The risk of not filling a shift with specialist doctors, vital to safe patient care, is unacceptably high. This is also not just an issue about the number of staff on duty at any one time; we need a permanent team to lead and develop our urgent and emergency care service to make it the best it can be for our patients. It is our ability to recruit that is our problem, not our ability to care.

The department will remain fully open in the day between 8am and 10pm, the times when about 80% of people who use Weston's A&E service attend. All other Weston hospital services are unaffected.

The NHS in the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire region has robust plans in place to respond to any immediate service changes that need to be made, such as this temporary overnight closure.

Neighbouring hospitals, out-of-hours GPs and the ambulance service will work with our staff to make sure patients can still get seen and treated for urgent and emergency care between the hours of 10pm and 8pm once this temporary overnight closure begins on 4 July.

During the temporary overnight closure local people should:

- Call non-emergency NHS 111 to be directed to the best medical care for their needs
- Call 999 for any serious or life-threatening conditions.

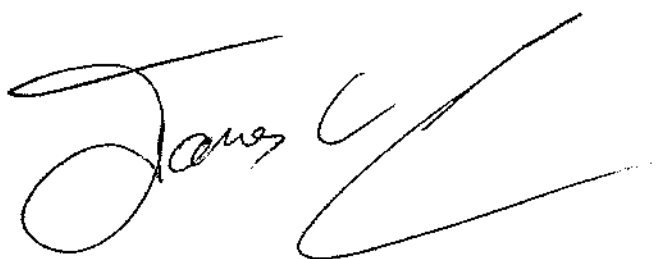
We would like to emphasise that this is a temporary measure. No permanent changes to A&E services or any other services in the hospital will be made without a full public consultation. A temporary overnight closure gives us time to work with local GPs, community services, social care colleagues, our commissioners and neighbouring hospitals to strengthen, redesign and rebuild our urgent and emergency care service in North Somerset.

North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (the body responsible for planning and buying services for local people) is already engaging with staff, patients, local people and communities in the area to work up ideas for a longer-term sustainable solution to the challenges faced. Please see www.northsomersetccg.nhs.uk for further details about how to get involved.

We know that our announcement today may cause some concern locally, but our priority always has to be the safety of patients. Please be assured that we are working hard with our staff, NHS partners, regulators and local communities to develop a long-term solution to these challenges. Our goal is to make sure local people can access safe, high quality, sustainable urgent and emergency services from wherever they live in North Somerset and to ensure all our patients get the best possible care across all our services, all of the time.

Kind Regards.

Yours sincerely



James Rimmer
Chief Executive



Graham Paine
Chairman

How many people will this temporary overnight change affect?

We know from attendance at our A&E that this will affect around 27 people a night. The vast majority – 80% of people who come to A&E – attend during the day. They will see no difference at all in the service.

Of the people attending at night, around 12 arrive by ambulance. Six of those patients typically are already transferred to other hospitals nearby for more specialist care and treatment. After 4 July those local patients who need to go to hospital by ambulance at night will be taken by the ambulance crew directly to neighbouring A&Es at Bristol and Taunton. They will be discharged, or transferred back to Weston as soon as they are fit enough to continue their treatment and recovery here, normally within 2-3 days.

Each night there are around 15 patients who attend our A&E who do not have life-threatening or serious conditions but require urgent care. After 4 July, they should dial 111 to seek advice and support. They may be referred to the out-of-hours GP service, or to overnight community care services until the following day when they can see their GP or other care provider.

