

Royal Brompton and Harefield Hospitals

Briefing Report for the Health and Social Care Select Committee April 2023

The main challenges being experienced in our hospitals currently are

- Elective recovery
- Recruitment
- Capital investment

Elective recovery

The reduction of the elective backlog resulting from the Covid pandemic has been a major priority for Brompton and Harefield Hospitals over the last 12 months.

Currently there are 590 patients awaiting an elective cardiac surgery procedure at our hospitals whereas pre-pandemic this number would have been approximately 400. There are 811 patients awaiting a cardiology procedure and pre-pandemic this number would have been approximately 700.

All elective patients on waiting lists are allocated a clinical priority (P2-P4) with the most clinically urgent elective patients being in the P2 category. Much work has gone into ensuring that patients waiting longer than normal on our waiting lists are closely monitored by the clinical teams. These risk of harm reviews are essential in order to detect any deterioration in the patient's condition, and this is then escalated to the Consultant for review. The risk of harm assessments are carried out either by telephone or via the Ortus clinical review platform that was rolled out this year. It allows patients to log how they are feeling and report any symptom change which again triggers an escalation to the Consultant if necessary. The new electronic Ortus platform has been received very well by patients.

The elective clearance challenge has been further complicated by an increased number of patients presenting to our hospitals non-electively either as emergencies via the Heart Attack Centre and the Aortic Dissection Service or by urgent transfer from other Hospitals. The ratio of non-elective to elective patients has been significantly higher than normal but does appear to be now slowly reducing.

The recent industrial action (and in particular the nurse and junior doctor strikes) have hindered the elective recovery programme with the strikes necessitating a dramatic reduction in elective activity in order to ensure the patients within the hospital are kept safe whilst still delivering emergency services.

With regards to long waiting patients, the national target set to eliminate all 78 week waiting elective patients by 1/04/23 has been met and we are now working towards the target of eliminating waits of over 65 weeks and are confident we will meet this much earlier than the set target date of March 2024.

Heart, Lung and Critical Care Clinical Group

Recruitment

There remain some difficult to recruit to areas, but one of these was addressed by the recent successful international recruitment drive for radiography staff.

There continues to be a high number of cardiac physiology vacancies due to the national shortage of physiologists. A recruitment and retention premium payment has been granted to the cardiac physiologists which should help and we have also been working closely with Brunel University to explore the creation of a Cardiac Physiology Apprenticeship and MSc programme. Such a programme would increase the supply of trained cardiac physiologists for the future.

There are also considerable difficulties recruiting Anaesthetic and Critical Care junior doctors with less overseas candidates applying for jobs than before the pandemic and Brexit.

Capital investment

The constraint on NHS capital expenditure continues and this is particularly concerned given the necessary rolling programme of cath lab replacements and the fact the cardiology unit (ACCU) delivering level 1 (ward) and level 2 (high dependency) care will require replacements in the next 4/5 years due to deterioration of the current prefabricated building.

Additional Updates for the Health and Social Care Select Committee

The amount of research studies being undertaken at Harefield Hospital is increasing and this year the Royal Brompton and Harefield Charity supported the development of a small dedicated clinical research facility where clinical staff can see patients who are participating in research studies.

The volume of heart and lung transplants undertaken in the last 12 month has increased with 38 heart and 16 lung transplants being undertaken and this exceeds pre-pandemic transplant activity.