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Plea to help ease pressure on A&E

Demand for NHS emergency care is exceptionally high this Winter and nowhere is this more evident than in South Tyneside.

However, local people can play an important part in relieving the burden on vital services, said South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust Chief Operating Officer Steve Williamson, thereby enabling staff to focus on seriously ill patients and emergencies.

He explained: "The heavy demand on emergency services is not unique to South Tyneside District Hospital and is, in fact, being experienced at various hospitals in the North East and throughout the country. Accident & Emergency (A&E) departments, such as ours, are for patients whose condition is critical or life-threatening. Those with injuries that are over 48 hours old, or who have had low level pain for a few days, should see their GP first.

"We would also encourage patients with ailments which are common at this time of year, such as coughs and colds, upset stomachs and general aches and pains, to self-care and ask their local pharmacist for advice. By staying at home and treating themselves with pain killers, rest and plenty of fluids, people are also helping to reduce the spread of viruses to vulnerable patients in NHS waiting rooms and leaving appointments available for those with serious health conditions who need to see a doctor or nurse."

Mr Williamson added: "Not only are our A&E attendances up compared to the previous year but we are also dealing with high numbers of complex, severe cases, including older people with respiratory illnesses who require admission, and it is thanks to our hardworking staff that we have managed to maintain the vast majority of services. They continue to daily provide care of the very highest standard and we are very proud of them for their dedication and commitment.

"We appreciate patients' understanding and patience if they do come to A&E and find they have to wait longer than normal. They can be assured that staff are doing their very best to attend to them as quickly as possible in order of clinical need."

Among those staff is Consultant Acute Physician Dr Shaz Wahid, whose job is to manage and treat emergency patients as effectively as possible. From 7.30am, he begins reviewing each of the patients on the 27-bedded Emergency Assessment Unit (EAU), requesting tests and treatment and co-ordinating the medical and nursing team. He then reviews patients on intensive care and coronary care before visiting A&E and the ambulatory care day unit, where expert treatment is combined with access to rapid diagnostic tests and early follow-up in dedicated acute access clinics.



New patients arriving on the EAU are assessed by a nurse and junior doctor and then Dr Wahid checks that the plans for tests and treatment are correct and delivered. At 5.30pm, he hands over his patients and a summary of the day to the on-call Consultant but he is still available for advice over the phone or may return to the hospital if asked to do so.

Dr Wahid works closely with the Clinical Site Manager of the day. In this role, Sam Carman deals with an average of 25 to 30 admissions each day, ensuring that they, and their relatives, have the best possible experience in a safe, clean environment, whilst maintaining their privacy and dignity.

Her first task at 7.30am is to receive a handover from the night co-ordinator regarding the numbers of patients admitted overnight, A&E activity, overall hospital bed status and any staffing issues relevant to the flow of patients through the hospital. Then, it's off to A&E to assess activity at the start of the day. From there, she moves on to assessing the status of non-urgent admissions and looking at potential issues and solutions to ensure that all patients can undergo their surgery on the planned day. Next, she walks round all the medical and surgical wards and speaks to the senior nurse on duty to discuss the bed situation in the light of planned and potential discharges and required admissions. The process of bed reassessments is a continuous throughout the day so that staff can respond to a developing situation in relation to bed capacity.

In the course of her day, which typically ends at 9pm, she also has frequent contact with GPs, intermediate care teams, community matrons and the A&E department requesting admission for patients, and from doctors from various other wards and clinics requesting either admission or transfer of patients.

Dr Wahid emphasised the need for the public's support in dealing with Winter pressures by appropriately using NHS services: "It's really important that we manage people quickly through the system and give them the right specialist support for their needs. Unfortunately, we do get large numbers of people attending A&E who could and should use other services and, inevitably, this adds to congestion and long waits."

Sam added: "Although my days are always busy, I never lose sight of the purpose of my job, which is to see that every single patient is assessed and treated in the right place by the right people at the right time to provide a safe and effective outcome. My colleagues and I really appreciate the public's help in our task of caring for patients at this time by choosing the right NHS service."

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Pictured above are of Consultant Acute Physician Dr Shaz Wahid and Clinical Site Manager Sam Carman.

Issued on behalf of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust by Kay Jordan

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