

September 22nd, 2016

Important information about acute stroke services in South Tyneside and Sunderland

Stroke care for both South Tyneside and Sunderland residents is to be temporarily centralised at Sunderland Royal Hospital to strengthen the service and to ensure the best possible patient outcomes.

The stroke service at South Tyneside District Hospital has been under pressure for about 18 months due to key senior medical, nursing and therapies staff vacancies.

Recruitment for one of its two permanent stroke consultant posts has been on-going since 2014, without success.

Dr Shaz Wahid, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's Medical Director, said: "We must stress that there is no immediate concern regarding patient safety at South Tyneside. However, the stroke service is vulnerable going forward due to national NHS recruitment challenges, which include a shortage of stroke physicians.

Dr Wahid continued: "In response to this, clinical leaders and executive directors at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust have agreed to a temporary solution of centralising all acute stroke care in Sunderland as soon as arrangements can be made.

"As well as addressing the issue of the vulnerability of the South Tyneside service, this will have the additional effect of improving the quality of stroke care for residents of both areas. National guidance is that, for teams to maintain specialist stroke skills, a minimum of 600 patients needs to be managed by them. Individually, neither South Tyneside District Hospital nor Sunderland Royal Hospital meets this requirement but together they do. By centralising stroke care, we will also be better placed to achieve key national standards and therefore ensure that we are providing the best possible care for local people to maximise the best possible recovery from having a stroke."

Doctors, nurses and other NHS staff in South Tyneside and Sunderland are already reviewing acute stroke services across both areas as part of the first phase of the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group's review of all clinical services in both Trusts. The aim of the programme is to identify opportunities to improve the quality and sustainability of services in the face of the unprecedented financial challenges, gaps in the availability of key staff and increasing demand on services facing the NHS nationally, regionally and locally.

Ken Bremner, Chief Executive of both Trusts, said: "We know that people might be concerned about these changes, however, we want to reassure them that we believe action has to be taken as quickly as possible to address the risk to stroke services and the short-term solution of centralising care will protect South Tyneside's stroke patients and improve stroke care for patients in South Tyneside and Sunderland.

"I must emphasise that this change is a temporary one while we consider the different ways stroke services could be arranged across both areas, and these different options will be subject to a future public consultation.

"We know that transport links will be a major concern for the public. As part of this work there will be an independent travel and transport impact study to look at all transport and travel as well as the viability of a patient shuttle bus between the hospitals."



Dr David Hambleton, Chief Officer for NHS South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group, the body responsible for the planning and commissioning of local NHS services for South Tyneside added: "We strongly support the Trusts' approach to protecting and improving stroke services in South Tyneside and Sunderland in the short-term. There will be many opportunities for local people to give their views on the future model when the engagement and consultation process begins. Their views are critical to how we develop services for them so they get the best care from the best person in the best place and at the best time."

Over the coming months there will be opportunities for patients to get involved and have a say in the way local services are delivered. We are encouraging the public to sign up for 'My NHS' so they can be kept informed.

For Sunderland, <http://www.sunderlandccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/my-nhs/>

For South Tyneside, <http://www.southtynesideccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/involve-me/> Or telephone for help to register: 0191 217 2670