

PRESS RELEASE – 6th November, 2017

Hospital alliance brings cataract care closer to home for South Tyneside eye patients



Patients in South Tyneside who are undergoing treatment for cataract problems are benefiting from having more care closer to home thanks to the strategic alliance between South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts.

For the first time ever, the majority of patients waiting for a cataract operation are now able to have all of their pre-operative care within the borough of South Tyneside, reducing the need to travel for pre-operative assessments for approximately 400 cataract patients every single year.

Sunderland Eye Infirmary, which provides a whole range of specialist ophthalmic services and sees 100,000 attendances a year from across the North East, has worked with South Tyneside for a number of years delivering outpatient clinics at the District Hospital in South Shields and at Palmer Community Hospital in Jarrow.

These outpatient clinics, led by consultants and supported by senior medical trainees, are for a variety of eye conditions, including first appointments and reviews. Previously, however, all pre-operative assessments for cataract procedures were undertaken at Sunderland Eye Infirmary, meaning hundreds of South Tyneside patients had to travel to Sunderland for relatively straightforward tests.

Thanks to the close partnership working between the two Trusts, new nurse-led pre-operative assessment clinics introduced in October at South Tyneside District Hospital mean that, unless patients require highly specialised surgery and ophthalmic imaging, the majority of South Tyneside's cataract patients will now only have to make the trip to Sunderland for the actual surgery.

They will receive vision testing using newly-purchased equipment costing £42,300 that is equivalent to that at Sunderland and will have their eyes tested specifically for the choice of lens implant needed for the cataract procedure.

The pre-operative assessment clinics are run by highly skilled and experienced ophthalmic nursing staff who make sure that the appropriate lens is ready and waiting in Sunderland for patients when they attend for surgery. The same specialist nurses also work as primary nurses within Sunderland Eye Infirmary's cataract centre, meaning patients will see familiar faces when they arrive for their surgery.

Consultant Ophthalmologist Oliver Baylis said: "The development of cataracts (a cloudy lens over the eye) is a very common cause of vision deterioration, especially amongst older people. Cataracts can be treated by an operation to remove the cloudy lens and replace it with a clear plastic lens and, as with any surgery, a thorough pre-operative assessment for every patient is necessary. Previously, patients in South Tyneside had to travel for this assessment but we can now offer this service locally, with just one clinic appointment needed to assess, investigate and plan surgery for the majority of cataract patients."

Lynn Bates, Cataract Treatment Centre Deputy Manager, said: "By providing the same specialised care in South Tyneside that is currently available in Sunderland,

we aim to have a positive impact on patients who will be seen at their local hospital, reducing travelling time and costs.”

The new clinics are the latest development to emerge through the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group strategic alliance, which was formed between South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts in March 2016. A joint executive management team has been in place since November 2016 and is working towards a shared vision to develop high quality healthcare services that will benefit local communities for many years to come.

Ken Bremner, Chief Executive of South Tyneside and City Hospitals NHS Foundation Trusts, said: “This latest initiative is just one example of the fantastic benefits for South Tyneside and Sunderland patients thanks to the joint working between our two Trusts. Bringing more of our specialist ophthalmology (eye) clinics to South Tyneside means more people will now be able to stay local for the majority of their care which is great news for patients.

“We know just how important it is for local communities to have equitable access to a wide range of safe, high quality healthcare services, which offer the very best possible health outcomes. This is one of the core aims of the Healthcare Group.

“As we look ahead to the future and how our hospital and community teams can continue to work in partnership to share clinical expertise and resource, we remain absolutely committed to achieving this collective ambition for people living across South Tyneside and Sunderland.”

Photo caption: Cataract Treatment Centre Deputy Manager Lynn Bates, left, and staff nurse Julie-Ann Marshall in the new clinic at South Tyneside District Hospital

Notes to editors

- Detailed work is currently taking place through the ‘Path to Excellence’ programme to discuss how South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts can work better together to improve quality of care and address the challenges and pressures facing the whole of the NHS. To

find out more about this work to date, including the questions and discussion notes from the recent consultation events, go to www.pathtoexcellence.org.uk