

**PRESS RELEASE – 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2017**

**Gateshead and South Tyneside sexual health staff  
stress importance of HIV testing on World AIDS Day**

As World AIDS Day on December 1<sup>st</sup> approaches, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's sexual health teams in Gateshead and South Tyneside are raising awareness of the fight against HIV and the importance of testing and early diagnosis.

On World AIDS Day, the Trust's sexual health staff, who can offer support and access to HIV testing, will be at Quenellies restaurant at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead from 9am-3pm.

Across the North East, there are around 1,800 people living with HIV, with one in six newly diagnosed cases seen in people over 50. Advances in treatment mean that people living with HIV/AIDS can now live a near-normal lifespan, however early diagnosis is absolutely key.

Certain groups, such as men who have sex with men, and Black African communities, are more at risk of getting HIV, but anyone can get it. South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust is encouraging anyone at risk of HIV, including those who have had sex with a new or casual partner, gets tested because those diagnosed early can have a life expectancy matching that of people who are not HIV infected.

Dr Medhat Basta, Consultant in Sexual Health with the Trust, said: "There have been many scientific advances in treatment for HIV over the years and although it is a chronic medical condition, it is easily treated with antiretroviral treatment. This allows patients living with HIV to have an almost normal life in terms of quality and longevity.

"HIV should no longer be an untreated or a stigmatised condition and we want HIV

testing to be seen as a normal part of taking care of your health and wellbeing especially if you have had unprotected sex with a new partner.

“While rates of late diagnosis are falling, too many people - particularly heterosexual men and women, patients who are older and people from Black African communities - are still diagnosed late. Earlier diagnosis will ensure better outcomes for the patient and reduce the transmission of infection to uninfected partners.

“We would always remind people that the best way to protect yourself from contracting any sexually transmitted disease, including HIV/AIDS is by practising safe sex and using condoms with all new and casual partners.”

For information about access to HIV testing and other sexual health services provided by South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust, including contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections contact:

- Gateshead 0191 2831577 or 0191 2831575
- South Tyneside 0191 4028191; or visit
- [www.stft.nhs.uk/service/sexual-health-services](http://www.stft.nhs.uk/service/sexual-health-services)

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust provides a range of community health services across South Tyneside, Sunderland and Gateshead, with about 1,500 staff supporting people in their own homes, and from various community venues, to stay healthy and well.

In support of World AIDS Day, North East local authorities will be lighting up key town/city landmarks as a mark of support to people living with HIV and to remember those who have sadly lost their lives to the disease.

**Ends**

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