



Fit For the Future

Developing Urgent and Hospital Care in Gloucestershire

Unite Gloucester Area Health Sector Branch Response

The Branch represents members who are emergency care doctors, paramedics and other ambulance staff and receptionists, as well as porters, nurses, allied health professionals and other ancillary staff.

Our priority is obviously to prevent job losses and to support the health & wellbeing of staff but, as our members strive to deliver the best care to patients that they can, we deplore any cutbacks to the service which the public should expect.

We are most concerned about these proposals and the effect that they will have on both the general population and our members.

The present situation is already causing many problems; we know that after 8pm patients in need of urgent care in the North East of the County are often taken to Warwick and those in the East of the County to Swindon. Will this become the norm 24hrs?

I have recently purchased a property in Tewkesbury, from where it is an easier drive to the Gloucestershire Royal Hospital (GRH), but if one was two or three miles nearer the A46, then it would be better to go to Cheltenham General Hospital (CGH), so obviously from Toddington or Winchcombe likewise.

Paramedics and other ambulance staff work virtually non-stop, there being little 'downtime' and often not able to take proper meal breaks and have any rest during shifts which are often of 12 hours.

Doctors working in A&E are under stress coping with high numbers of patients and trying to operate within the target deadlines. Receptionists and other ancillary staff also work in this heightened stressful environment.

If the A&E at CGH were to become an Urgent Treatment Centre, only taking 'walk in' patients, the present situation would reach intolerable proportions. At present the numbers are that CGH has just under 50% of the number attending GRH. One recent recorded figure was ninety at GRH and 36 at CGH. The department at GRH was under considerable pressure so, if the 36 from CGH were to be added it could have reached a critical position.

/Doctors

Reached a Critical Position/

Doctors working in the A&E department at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital (GRH) would have increased stress levels, fighting against targets being breached. It is recognised that these doctors need to observe patients and consider a wide range of symptoms to come to a correct diagnosis. Piling more pressure upon them is not only unfair, but will increase the stress they are under, resulting in the possibility of poorer outcomes for patients.

Paramedics and ambulance crews will also see rising stress levels. Imagine that you pick up a patient, proceeding to GRH, knowing that the A&E department is already at capacity and that you might not be able to take your patient off the ambulance and into the department.

Stress levels would be at breaking point, staff will burn out and, in a service already having recruitment and retention problems, the result could well be that the older and more experienced staff will be taking early or medical retirement.

One can also imagine the stress that receptionists would be under; with a department heaving with patients they have to observe parents with a small child or somebody with an elderly relative entering, knowing that they are going to have a very long wait.

The triage system could be overwhelmed for when the number of patients reach these sorts of critical levels. How can they be passed on for treatment in any real order of priority? It will become impossible to decide, other than the most life threatening, as to whom requires treatment before someone else.

The effects on morale will sweep through the unit, affecting every member of staff working in such an atmosphere.

Another area of concern is that with less surgical facilities at CGH, meaning less surgeons and registrars available to the Urgent Treatment Centre, it may become a standalone operation. This could open it up for the possibility of being put out for tender and becoming operated by a private company in the future. We are totally against the continued fragmentation of the NHS and are, therefore, mindful of anything which could see more of this locally.

NOTE

This is happening against the backdrop of substantial fears that the two late opening Minor Injury Units, at Cirencester and Stroud, are about to have their hours reduced to 8am until 8pm, having already been reduced from 24hrs to 8am until 11pm.

Reg Beagley, Vice Chair, on behalf of the Officers of Gloucester Area Health Sector Branch of Unite the Union