

Title: **Update on services at the Emergency Department, Torbay Hospital**

Public Agenda Item: **Yes**

Wards Affected: **All**

To: **Health Scrutiny Board**      On: **20 February 2014**

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## **1. Purpose and Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to update the Health Scrutiny Board on developments in the Emergency Department service at Torbay Hospital, run by South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.
- 1.2 It gives details of a change in the internal configuration of staffing within the Emergency Department, so that five more specialist nurses are now funded, instead of a GP and/or general nurse. .
- 1.3 It sets out the reasoning for this decision and how it was arrived at.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The service run by Devon Doctors opened in April 2009, with the expectation that patients could register with the GP service, and that patients could walk in for treatment or care. However, numbers fell far below the expected levels, and in 2011 Devon Doctors and the then commissioner, Torbay Care Trust, varied the contract, by mutual agreement, to provide a “primary care” service within the Emergency Department.
- 2.2 Under mutually agreed clinical guidelines, patients arriving at the Emergency Department were triaged in the normal way to establish the priority of their needs. With a GP available as part of the Emergency Department service, those patients who were assessed as having the kind of minor illnesses that might normally be seen in general practice were directed to the GP service, although it should be said that many would not have been aware that they were seeing anyone other than an Emergency Department doctor. The GP service operated from 8am to 8pm.

### **3. Reason for the changes**

- 3.1 Commissioners continued to have concerns about the cost-effectiveness of the GP service within the Emergency Department, given the low levels of activity. In September 2013 the then-shadow Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS Torbay decided the funding could be put to better use. Consequently, Devon Doctors was given 12 months' notice on the contract.
- 3.2 The Urgent and Emergency Care Network groups the CCG, South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, South Western Ambulance Services NHS Foundation Trust, Torbay and Southern Devon Health and Care NHS Trust, Devon Doctors and – more latterly – a lay member to represent the public. In May 2013 this Network considered a paper describing the service, activity levels, costs and patient experience.
- 3.3 The satisfaction level and experience of those patients who were seen and treated was good. However, the Network concluded that the cost per patient was broadly equivalent to the national payment-by-results tariff, and that it would be better value for money to have South Devon Healthcare providing the service “at cost”.
- 3.4 For the period mid-May to mid-August 2013, a review showed that some 19% of the GP shifts within the Emergency Department went unfilled. In addition, some other shifts were covered by a nurse rather than a GP.

### **4. The changes made**

- 4.1 In August 2013, the Urgent and Emergency Care Network approved a proposal from South Devon Healthcare to recruit five additional specialist nurses to the Emergency Department, to manage the c7,000 patients who would have been seen by the GP (or nurse). It was agreed these additional nurses would include two with specialist paediatric skills. This reflected the fact that children under 5 were among the most common attendees.
- 4.2 To allow time for this recruitment to take place, the contract with Devon Doctors was extended to 30 November 2013. The importance of providing the service was prioritised as 1) at weekends 2) from 2pm-8pm, and 3) from 8am-2pm.
- 4.3 The service stopped at the end of November 2013. Leaflets were made available to anyone with queries about the change.

### **5. Attendances**

- 5.1 Patients seldom repeated their visits to the GP service; 89% used the service only once in a 12 month period. On average, two patients an hour were seen.
- 5.2 In 2011-12 the total number of patients attending was 8,792. Of these, the most common categories of users were children under the age of five (17%) and Torbay Hospital employees (8%). The service was mostly used by under 18s

and overall, more females attended than males. In 2012-13 the number of patients attending the service was 8,819.

## **6. Performance in the Emergency Department**

- 6.1 The winter period has, as usual, been busy for the Emergency Department. Attendances and the number of admissions have been much in line with the similar period in 2012/13. However, there has been a marked increase in the complexity of the conditions of those patients attending, requiring more patients to be admitted to the hospital for a longer period. This “length of stay” has an inevitable impact on the flow of patients through the system, in turn having an effect on Accident and Emergency, and resulting in poorer performance against the national target of waits not exceeding four hours. Patients requiring admission with these increasingly complex and multiple conditions would not be those seen or treated by a GP.