

Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Briefing Note: An update from Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust

Purpose of the briefing note: To answer previous questions from members and provide updates on operational data from Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust

1. This briefing provides an update on topics from the meeting on 11 January 2024 and the Trust's operational update.

2. Operational update from the Trust

2.1 Industrial action

- Staff continue to work hard to provide patients with the best possible care during the ongoing industrial action
- Wherever possible, elective activity (both outpatients and inpatient) continues – especially in high-priority services for example, cancer treatments. Where cancellations happen, most patients are given another appointment close to their original date, although the impact continues to be felt after industrial action has finished, as people delay coming to receive help and the Trust seeks to recover lost activity.

Cancelled activity

- The Trust has faced over a year of industrial action and has cancelled or postponed over 34,601 outpatient appointments since industrial action began in April, including new and follow-up outpatient appointments, as well as 4,677 inpatient and day case surgeries.
- The Trust has worked to put on catch-up clinics in those areas where there is a lot of demand.
- As a result of the latest strike running from 24-28 February, 74 inpatient and day case surgeries and 790 outpatient appointments were rescheduled. This has a negative effect on the Trust's ability to reduce waiting times for treatment, particularly in general surgery, ear, nose and throat, urology, gynaecology, and trauma and orthopaedics.

Impact on cancer care

- Sadly, cancer-related appointments made up 10% of all cancelled appointments. These appointments and surgeries are prioritised for rebooking at the earliest opportunity. These decisions are not made lightly,

and clinicians review the patient's level of clinical need before making any decision to postpone.

2.2 Urgent and emergency care

- Across the Trust's emergency departments (EDs), performance against the four-hour standard in January was 67.3%, up from 65.2% in December. Performance has improved in all sites
- The Trust has undertaken a number of initiatives and schemes to improve urgent and emergency care delivery during February and March. This includes:
 - Initiatives at Basildon Hospital to direct trauma and orthopaedics cases to the fracture clinic, provide early access for stable early pregnancy, make the referral process to surgery smoother, and rearrange wards to reduce children's admissions.
 - There are ongoing efforts at Southend and Basildon hospitals to improve the use of clinical decisions units, especially overnight
 - The Trust is also adjusting medical staffing in its EDs to support capacity and flow, including the recruitment of 101 additional doctors
 - Work is underway across the Integrated Care System to reduce ambulance arrivals through unplanned care coordination hubs, which can reduce admissions by 30% when operational.

2.3 Ambulance handovers

- The Trust continues to receive a very high number of patients at all three EDs.
- The time to hand over patients has improved in January. 77% of the ambulances were handed over in under 30 minutes, up from 72.1% in December; and 38.2% handed over in under 15 minutes, up from 35.6% in December.
- Work has started to standardise rapid assessment, treatment and ambulance handovers processes.
- The Trust's continuous focus on length of stay reduction, while improving streaming and triage, will ease pressure on the EDs and improve flow out, which will in turn allow for more effective handover times.

2.4 Discharges from hospital

Timely discharge is important for better outcomes and recovery. People often recover more quickly with the right support at home, as soon as they are medically well enough to leave. It's also important in preventing deconditioning and mobility loss from being in hospital for longer periods.

- The Trust remains in a good position both regionally and nationally for the numbers of patients waiting to be discharged from its hospitals. 46.1% of patients are in hospital for at least seven days, compared to 46.3% for the region, and 25.2% stay for over 14 days, compared to 25.7% in the region.

- There are ongoing efforts to improve discharge rates, with senior staff in each site conducting weekly patient reviews. However, challenges remain in community and social care.

2.5 Cancer performance

- The Trust continues to work on improving cancer performance, and is having limited successes in reducing its waiting lists during the busy winter period.
- The Trust has a target that 75% of people are given their cancer diagnosis within 28 days by March 2024 – the faster diagnosis standard (FDS). Performance was 62.2% in December, up from 59.9% in November.
- The Trust plans to have no more than 475 patients waiting over 62 days to start to receive treatment by the end of March 2024. At the end of January there were 747 patients waiting more than 62 days, down from 826 in December, which is 229 above the original 2023/24 plan.
- The cancers contributing most to the backlogs are colorectal, urology, skin, gynaecology, and breast. The Trust is putting on extra weekend clinics, a new process to triage patients, and bringing in additional capacity to the Trust. Specific measures include:
 - Urology: a rapid access clinic for outpatient services will be offered in Basildon Hospital, mirroring the service in Southend. Clinical Nurse Specialists can now carry out triage of patients in Basildon and Southend hospitals, with this due to be cascaded into Broomfield as well.
 - Skin: tele-dermatology continues to reduce referrals coming into the Trust, additional clinics are being put on in Broomfield and Basildon hospitals so that more patients can be seen, and new administrative staff have been appointed.
 - Gynaecology: additional clinics are being put on, a one-stop clinic has been introduced at Broomfield Hospital, where women can be seen and have scans during one session. Women are benefitting from new clinical triage processes.
 - Breast: capacity has been brought to Basildon Hospital from elsewhere in the Trust as it is the most challenged site. This is bringing in 75 additional clinic slots per month. Across all three hospitals, additional capacity from outside the Trust has been brought in, providing 325 additional slots that will help to reduce the backlog of patients.
 - Head and neck: a specialist consultant has been appointed at Basildon Hospital.

2.6 Elective care and referral to treatment

- The Trust is working hard to reduce the number of patients waiting for their routine elective treatments. The national total waiting list has grown since the pandemic, but through a combination of validation and improvement programmes the Trust's total waiting list fell in January to reach 158,000, having been 191,000 in September.
- Across the NHS there is a focus to reduce waits of more than 65 weeks for elective care. In January there were 5,000 patients waiting for this time, down from almost 90,000 in April 2023. Following industrial action that

took place around the Christmas period in December 2023 and January 2024, the Trust forecasts there will be 1,033 patients in this group at the end of March 2024.

- Risks to performance include further industrial action, the referral of patients back to the Trust from community ear, nose and throat (ENT) providers, and the complexities involved in providing plastic surgery.
- The Trust continues its programme to improve outpatient services, which involves developing new models of care in a range of specialties. One example is patient-initiated follow up, which is offered in services where it is clinically appropriate and involves patients seeking care should they need it, instead of automatically scheduling in appointments. This reduces appointments that are not needed and gives patients greater control. The Trust achieved this for 5.9% of patients in October, which was above the national 5% target and the highest level in the region.
- Other plans include increasing the efficiency and use of theatres across the Trust's hospitals, including in the trauma and orthopaedic hub at Braintree which has carried out more than 1,500 day-case and inpatient elective procedures since April 2023.
- The Trust continues to recruit more staff, including healthcare support workers, nursing staff, and estates roles which means that patients can be treated more quickly and improves their experience. Both vacancies and staff turnover have fallen to their lowest since the pandemic.
- Extra diagnostic hubs are being set up for areas where there are the most people waiting. This includes an ophthalmology diagnostic hub in Orsett Hospital, to support faster diagnosis of common eye conditions, including glaucoma and retina conditions. A further diagnostic hub is planned for the mid Essex area later in the year.

2.7 Diagnostics

- Providing fast diagnostics is crucial for reducing wait times for cancer or routine care. The Trust is working to ensure patients receive tests within six weeks and achieved this for 69.5% of patients in January, up by 0.2% in December.
- There has been considerable improvement in obstetric ultrasound and urodynamics in December, while services including audiology and cystoscopy faced challenges due to increased demand and vacancies.
- The demand for MRI scans continues to be higher than expected, increasing the backlog. Additional mobile capacity has been added which can be used until March 2024. Additional CT, MRI and ultrasound capacity has also been sourced, with support for gynaecology, prostate and colorectal patients.
- Interventional radiology waiting times have been higher due to demand, vacancies and industrial action, although recruitment has been successful.
- Community diagnostic centres will increase capacity for tests in mid and south Essex in 2024/25 and will be based in community locations. Until they are built, temporary mobile facilities are being installed at Orsett and Braintree hospitals, which will additionally provide 1,700 CT and 1,100 MRI scans per month. These will support more procedures to be carried

out for cancer and routine care.

- The newly installed mobile endoscopy unit at Orsett Hospital in February has seen 465 patients, providing vital testing capacity to the local population.

2.8 Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust Strategy

- The Trust is undertaking a ten-year (2025-35) strategy development programme with an aim for its new strategy to be published in early 2025. It is starting engagement with partners to help feed their and views from local communities into this work over the rest of 2024. Please contribute when the team reaches out over the next two-three months.

2.9 News and developments

- The team at the world-renowned Essex Cardiothoracic Centre (CTC) have been shortlisted for a Global Cardiovascular Award in the Digital Innovation category for helping improve the lives of over 340 patients through an app called Fibrichck. Using this app, the team helps with early detection of irregular heart rhythms in patients, meaning they can get help and expert advice much sooner.
- Across Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust 430 staff have advanced their careers through apprenticeships. National Apprenticeship Week in February was the perfect showcase for their achievements and the opportunities they have found through their qualification.
- The local NHS is seeking views and ideas on proposals for future arrangements for inpatient services at our community hospitals, freestanding midwife-led birthing unit, and other patient services provided at St Peter's Hospital, Maldon. The consultation will run from 25 January to 21 March 2024. People can visit the dedicated engagement platform MSE Virtual Views (<https://virtualviews.midandsouthessex.ics.nhs.uk/changes-to-services>) to find out more.

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