

Changes to urgent care services in South Tyneside Briefing note, September 2015

Background

From 1 October, the way local people in South Tyneside access urgent health care is changing.

A new urgent care hub will open at South Tyneside General Hospital, with the existing Jarrow walk-in centre relocating to form part of the hub. This will create a one-stop shop, with a range of services available behind a single front door.

National evidence shows that this is the most clinically effective way to provide high quality health care for the local community. A single hub will benefit patients by ensuring they are guided to the right professional, first time – freeing up A&E staff to concentrate on genuine emergencies, and meaning that everyone benefits from a more efficient NHS.

Jarrow walk-in centre was established five years ago to reduce the pressure on A&E, but sadly it has not done that. In the financial year 2013-2014 there were 56,548 A&E attendances seen and treated at South Tyneside General Hospital (STGH). Of those, 65% were given verbal or written advice or reassurance and required no further treatment. An audit of attendances at A&E included sore throats, headaches, eye infections, insect bites and skin rash.

Consultation and decision

We do understand people's concerns about these changes, but it is important to be clear that this was a clinical decision, based on strong national evidence showing that a single urgent care hub can free up A&E staff to concentrate on the most urgent cases, with patients being guided to the best service for their needs.

We gathered comments from thousands of local people through a detailed public consultation, with views collected in several different ways including online, at community meetings and by simply knocking on doors.

As a result, we have focused on six key concerns raised by local people. These were later endorsed by the independent reconfiguration panel.

The Health and Wellbeing Board, the body which has had oversight of progress against these six recommendations, is satisfied with the steps that we have taken.

Our work in relation to these concerns has included an independent study into availability of GP appointments. This showed that levels of satisfaction in South Tyneside are now higher than the national average, but we know there is room for improvement, so we have worked with practices to encourage improvements in access and a number of changes have resulted. We continue to work with local practices and with NHS England to ensure that access to GP services across the borough is good.

We have also launched Think Pharmacy First, which provides free consultations to everyone and free medicines for a range of minor illnesses. If you don't pay for your prescriptions, you may be able to get free over the counter medicines through this scheme.

Think Pharmacy First is being promoted widely across the borough, with additional marketing, advertising and social media activity helping people to choose the right NHS service under the new arrangements.

An independent travel, transport and access review has shown that the majority of South Tyneside patients are able to access the district hospital site within 40 minutes using public transport. Indeed the relocation will reduce the number of patients who have to travel over 5km to the nearest walk-in centre from 24% to 16%.

South Tyneside District Hospital has 875 parking spaces, and a Travel Action Plan is in place which includes plans for additional



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However, we are working to raise awareness of the wider range of NHS services from pharmacists and GPs to calling NHS 111, which means that many patients can get the treatment they need in their local community without travelling to the urgent care hub. We will continue to monitor these concerns over the coming months.

Studies of walk-in centre usage showed a significant number of patients under the age of 24, often attending for minor problems that could have been dealt with by a pharmacist or GP. Our current marketing campaigns around Think Pharmacy First and how to make the best use of NHS services include significant levels of digital and social media marketing to help this group find the most appropriate service for their needs.

In addition, South Tyneside Council is rolling out 'A Better U', which is a programme supporting people to take more responsibility for their own health and wellbeing through improved self-care. Better U champions are helping to support the programme by promoting the benefits to local people.

Advice for patients

The NHS provides a range of services locally, and we would encourage everyone to help the NHS run smoothly by choosing the right service for their needs:

Using your GP: GP practices can treat the majority of healthcare needs, and should be the first point of contact for most medical issues.

Everyone should be registered with a GP – anyone who is not registered can find helpful information at www.nhs.uk.

Pharmacists: Local pharmacists can provide immediate expert advice on many common health problems, from migraines, period pain and teething to hay fever, head lice and ear infections. Many have private consulting rooms. There are 39 pharmacies in South Tyneside, with 17 open on Saturdays and three offering evening opening and Sunday daytime opening (visit www.nhs.uk for details). If a pharmacist is concerned about your health issue, they will refer you to your GP.

If you don't normally pay for your medicines, then you don't need to pay with Think Pharmacy First – you can get them free and over the counter without seeing your GP.

NHS 111: If your GP practice is closed and you need urgent healthcare, just call 111. NHS 111 is a service for when you urgently need medical help, but it is not a life-threatening situation, and can signpost you to the right local NHS service.

For immediate, life-threatening emergencies, 999 is still the number to call. You can also contact the out-of-hours dental service through NHS 111.

South Tyneside Urgent Care Hub: Your GP or NHS 111 may refer you to the new urgent care hub if you need urgent treatment but it is not a serious health emergency. The new hub is located alongside A&E, so that patients can be directed to the right service, first time.

A&E or 999: Please only use the 999 service for serious health emergencies like a major accident, broken bones, breathing problems, severe chest pains, unconsciousness, suspected stroke or severe blood loss.