

UNISON Response to Cumbria Success Regime Consultation

Introduction to UNISON and Summary of Our Concerns (Consultation Question 8)

UNISON represents staff across Cumbria's health and care system: in Cumberland Infirmary and West Cumberland Hospital, across the county's community hospitals and community health services, in social care, and in the Ambulance Service.

We regard this consultation as important as it will potentially affect services that are crucial to vulnerable people – to expectant mothers, sick children and adults suffering strokes.

NHS organisations in Cumbria are clearly grappling with the challenges of staffing services in a context of:

- mounting financial pressure (“we need to live within our budget”, p. 6)
- covering a large geographical area with low population density
- an ageing population and increasing need for services
- the trend towards large scale specialist services being seen as best practice and more attractive to staff

There may be a tension on occasions between offering local services that are easily accessible to the public and offering services that provide specialist care. However we are concerned that the proposed changes being put to the public:

- 1) consistently involve the reduction in availability of health services in West Cumbria – which threatens the ability of the NHS to provide universal, appropriate services to all.
- 2) do not adequately take into account the difficulties for patients, relatives and ambulances in travelling between West Cumbria and Carlisle – which are likely to cause additional inconvenience, distress and, on occasions, danger to patients.
- 3) too readily accept as a given the financial restrictions on spending - despite mounting pressure for increased Government funding nationally (see for example, letter from Chair of the House of Commons Health Select Committee to Philip Hammond, 26 October 2016) and the exceptional circumstances in Cumbria that require additional resources.
- 4) have been drawn up without sufficient public involvement and through a process that is poor value for money. We note that the costs of the Success Regime process itself are high, with £800,000 out of a £1.2m budget leaking out of the NHS to private consultancies in 2015/16 - a figure likely to be exceeded in 2016/17 with a total budget of £5m (see: See: http://successregimecumbria.nhs.uk/images/FOI/Success_Regime_-_West_North_and_East_Cumbria.pdf)

Community Hospitals (Consultation Question 3)

Concerns have already been raised by our members working in community hospitals about the proposed bed closures. Staff are concerned about job loss, changes to their role and work location, and whether they will have the opportunity and time to develop new skills. Staff feel upset and anxious about the future. They continue to provide high quality care to those older adults in our community hospitals, whilst trying to reassure them that they will be cared for. A member commented about how upset she was while caring for an elderly woman who broke down in tears as she believes that the new system will mean she will be put into a care home as the hospital will not be there to help her get better and go home. Staff are worried about their own futures and struggling to reassure worried patients.

Maternity Care (Consultation Question 1)

The second option (which is presented as the preferred option) would mean that expectant mothers who are deemed high risk will need to be transferred to Carlisle.

We are concerned about what happens when a birth that is predicted to be routine becomes high risk. It is frequently quoted that there are 20 minutes from decision to incision in the case of emergency caesarean births. If there are no consultants able to perform this at West Cumberland Hospital we are very concerned that this would put the lives of both mother and baby at risk. There is also the question of whether an ambulance would be available to transfer them to Cumberland Infirmary. Cumberland Infirmary itself has capacity issues and there have been reports of expectant mothers transferring to West Cumberland Hospital due to bed shortages in Carlisle.

Children's Services (Consultation Question 2)

The proposals are to remove all children's inpatient beds at West Cumberland with a view to providing short term paediatric assessments for sick children but providing minimal beds for children who are deemed less acute with low risk illness.

We are very concerned about the prospect of treating sick children so far away from their families. It will cause great difficulties for parents in West Cumbria in visiting their child – especially if they rely on public transport and if they have other caring responsibilities. It is bad for the child's well-being and recovery. The proposal also requires an ambulance to be readily available to transport a child in an acute episode of illness to Cumberland Infirmary.

Hyper-acute Stroke Services (Consultation Question 5)

The consultation document states that it is estimated by 2020, that there will be a likely increase of admissions from 600 to 700 per year. The proposal is to manage all people suffering from a hyper-acute stroke in Carlisle.

Thrombolysis is a major part of treatment for people suffering from a stroke caused by a blood clot. The time window for treatment is four and a half hours for this to be effective. The consultation document clearly states that management and clinicians are acutely aware of the access issues this raises for those who live a long distance from Carlisle but believe only one or two people will be affected by this. This is one or two more people than necessary! Again this service is reliant on an ambulance service being readily available.

Headlines about UNISON's view (for newsletter / press release)

UNISON does not support the proposals because:

- All our communities should have easy access to universal health services – the NHS should not retreat from West Cumbria.
- It takes a long time to travel from West Cumbria to Carlisle – long journeys cause inconvenience, stress and even danger to patients. Transfers between the two sites should be minimised.
- Cumbria is a special case and needs more money per patient so that services are high-quality and accessible.
- The Success Regime process is itself wasteful in spending NHS money on private management consultants.