

The Case for Change

Background

There are already some very good health services in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. They have developed over many years to try to best meet the needs and expectations of the populations served, including that of Mid-Wales. Nevertheless, when we look at the changing needs of the population now and that forecast for the coming years; when we look at the quality standards that we should aspire to for our population, as medicine becomes ever more sophisticated; and when we look at the economic environment that the NHS must live within; then it becomes obvious that the time has come to look again at how we design services so we can meet the needs of our population and provide excellent healthcare services for the next 20 years.

When considering the pattern of services currently provided, our local clinicians and indeed many of those members of the public who have responded to the recent Call to Action consultation, accept that there is a case for making significant change provided there is no predetermination and that there is full engagement in thinking through the options. They see the opportunity for:

- Better clinical outcomes through bringing specialists together, treating a higher volume of cases routinely so as to maintain and grow skills
- Reduced morbidity and mortality through ensuring a greater degree of consultant-delivered clinical decision-making more hours of the day and more days of the week through bringing teams together to spread the load
- A pattern of services that by better meeting population needs, by delivering quality comparable with the best anywhere, by working through resilient clinical teams, can become highly attractive to the best workforce and can allow the rebuilding of staff morale
- Better adjacencies between services through redesign and bringing them together
- Improved environments for care
- A better match between need and levels of care through a systematic shift towards greater care in the community and in the home
- A reduced dependence on hospitals as a fall-back for inadequate provision elsewhere and instead hospitals doing to the highest standards what they are really there to do (higher dependency care and technological care)
- A far more coordinated and integrated pattern of care, across the NHS and across other sectors such as social care and the voluntary sector, with reduced duplication and better placing of the patient at the centre of care

They see the need and the potential to do this in ways which recognise absolutely the differing needs and issues facing our most dispersed rural populations and our urban populations too.

This then is the positive case for change.....

.....the opportunity to improve the quality of care we provide to our changing population.

The Challenges

Our local clinicians and respondents to the Call to Action also see this opportunity to systematically improve care as being a necessary response to how we address the many challenges faced by the service as it moves forward into the second and third decades of the 21st century.

These challenges are set out below - they are largely outside our control and we have to adapt our services to meet them:

Changes in our population profile - The remarkable and welcome improvement in the life expectancy of older people that has been experienced across the UK in recent years is particularly pronounced in Shropshire where the population over 65 has increased by 25% in just 10 years. This growth is forecast to continue over the next decade and more. As a result the pattern of demand for services has shifted with greater need for the type of services that can support frailer people, often with multiple long-term conditions, to continue to live with dignity and independence at home and in the community.

Changing patterns of illness - Long-term conditions are on the rise as well, due to changing lifestyles. The means we need to move the emphasis away from services that support short-term, episodic illness and infections towards services that support earlier interventions to improve health and deliver sustained continuing support, again in the community.

Higher expectations - Quite rightly, the population demands the highest quality of care and also a greater convenience of care, designed around the realities of their daily lives. For both reasons, there is a push towards 7-day provision or extended hours of some services, and both of these require a redesign of how we work given the inevitability of resource constraints.

Clinical standards and developments in medical technology - Specialisation in medical and other clinical training has brought with it significant advances as medical technology and capability have increased over the years. But it also brings challenges. It is no longer acceptable nor possible to staff services with generalists or juniors and the evidence shows, that for particularly serious conditions, to do so risks poorer outcomes. Staff are, of course, aware of this. If they are working in services that, for whatever reason, cannot meet accepted professional standards, morale falls and staff may seek to move somewhere that can offer these standards. It is also far more difficult to attract new staff to work in such a service. Clinicians are a scarce and valuable resource. We must seek to deploy them to greatest effect.

Economic challenges - The NHS budget has grown year on year for the first 60 years of its lifein one decade across the turn of the 21st century its budget doubled in real terms. But now the world economy and the UK economy within that is in a different place. The NHS will at best have a static budget going forward. And yet the changing patterns of population and resultant need, the increasing costs of ever improving medical technology, the difficulties in simply driving constant productivity improvements in a service that is 75% staff costs and that works to deliver care to people through people, mean that without changing the basic pattern of services then costs will rapidly outstrip available resources and services will face the chaos that always arises from deficit crises.

Opportunity costs in quality of service - In Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin the inherited pattern of services, especially hospital services, across multiple sites means that services are struggling to avoid fragmentation and are incurring additional costs of duplication and additional pressures in funding. The clinical and financial sustainability of acute hospital services has been a concern for more than a decade. Shropshire has a large enough population to support a full range of acute general hospital services, but splitting these services over two sites is increasingly difficult to maintain without compromising the quality and safety of the service.

Most pressingly, the Acute Trust currently runs two full A&E departments and does not have a consultant delivered service 16 hours/day 7 days a week. Even without achieving Royal College standards the Trust currently has particular medical workforce recruitment issues around A&E services, stroke, critical care and anaesthetic cover. All of these services are currently delivered on two sites though stroke services have recently been brought together on an interim basis. This latter move has delivered measurable improvements in clinical outcomes.

Impact on accessing services for populations living in two urban centres and much more sparsely populated rural communities - In Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin there are distinctive populations. Particular factors include our responsibility for meeting the health needs of sparsely populated rural areas in the county, and that services provided in our geography can also be essential to people in parts of Wales. Improved and timely access to services is a very real issue and one which the public sees as a high priority. We have a network of provision across Community Hospitals that can be part of the redesign of services to increase local care.

Call to Action

In November 2013 we ran a major consultation exercise with public and clinicians under the national Call to Action for the NHS. The response was very clear in saying that the public wanted full engagement in thinking through options for the future and that nothing should be predetermined. Nevertheless, in the light of the factors described above, there was real consensus between public and clinicians about the following:

- An acceptance of there being a case for making significant change;
- A belief that this should be clinically-led and with extensive public involvement;
- A belief that there were real opportunities to better support people in managing their own health and to provide more excellent care in the community and at home;
- An agreement that hospitals are currently misused. This is not deliberate but as a result of poor design of the overall system and the lack of well understood and properly resourced alternatives;
- A belief that it is possible to design a new pattern of services that can offer excellence in meeting the distinctive and particular needs of the rural and urban populations of this geography - but if we are to succeed we must avoid being constrained by history, habit and politics.