

## Smooth transfer of Emergency Department

Emergency Department services were transferred from Belfast City Hospital to the Royal and Mater Hospitals on 1 November – thanks to a huge co-ordinated effort by staff at all levels.

Bernie Owens, Chair of the Implementation Team said that preparation work over the previous eight weeks had ensured a smooth transfer for patients and staff.

“The work of staff, coupled with a widespread public information campaign meant we were able to proceed as planned with the temporary closure of the Emergency Department at Belfast City Hospital,” she said.

“Partnership working with GPs, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust also helped ensure an effective service for patients was maintained.”

In the first few days of the new arrangements, while there were modest increases in attendances seen at the Mater and Royal Emergency Departments, overall in Belfast there was a slight decrease. However this was also the case in other Emergency Departments across Northern Ireland, so it is too soon to make a judgement on the effect of the changes.



### Staffing

Medical staffing of Emergency Departments remains a challenge – even with the new arrangements we have put in place. Recruitment is continuing and we are endeavouring to ensure the right level of staffing, to meet patient needs, at all times. It is important to take this opportunity to recognise and acknowledge the contribution from staff during this process. Specifically those staff directly and indirectly affected by the closure. Their willingness and co-operation made the transition a success. Also thanks and recognition is extended to Trade Union colleagues for their consistent involvement and contribution in order to minimise, as far as possible, the impact to patients and staff.

### Belfast Hospitals Network

Although the Emergency Department at Belfast City Hospital has temporarily closed, the City Hospital remains an important acute site of the Belfast Trust hospitals network.

The two adult Emergency Departments are the gateway to three acute hospitals – the City, Royal and Mater – arrangements are in place to ensure all hospital beds across Belfast are used appropriately. Clinicians are working together so patients are treated in the right place, at the right time.

## Acute Assessment Unit

GPs are now referring patients directly to the Acute Assessment Unit at Belfast City Hospital with the agreement of senior medical staff at the unit. The unit has also been accepting transfers from the Royal and Mater as appropriate.



## General Medical Council / NI Medical and Dental Training Agency Visit

The recent visit, at the end of October, was helpful. It confirmed real progress in the delivery of good quality, safe training and supervision of the junior doctors in the Emergency Departments across the Trust. This was supported by an orientation and induction programme for those moving either to the Mater or Royal site.



## Community Services

Additional staffing arrangements provided within hospital social work services have helped ensure patients receive the necessary support and follow-on care required. The ongoing work with the social work team at the Ulster Hospital Dundonald has been invaluable in this regard.

## Regional Acute Eye Service

An enhanced eye emergency service at the Royal hospitals site is helping to ensure that these patients are seen and treated even more promptly. The Regional Acute Eye Service extended its opening hours from 24 October – and up to 20 patients a day are being seen by this service at the weekend – rather than having to wait in A&E. Both medical and nursing staff covering the acute eye service at the weekends have reported that the new arrangements have enabled a more co-ordinated approach to the admission of patients to the ophthalmology wards.

## EQUALITY

The Trust Health and Social Inequalities team has ensured that all information on the temporary closure was provided in the most popular BME languages (Black Minority Ethnic) for those who do not speak English as a competent second language. The feedback we have received from service users, community groups and ethnic organisations was very positive. Equality of access to information is of strategic importance to the Trust with its overall purpose to improve health and well being and reduce inequalities.