

**To: Chairs of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees; Healthwatch Nottingham**

**Stakeholder briefing**

**RE: Shortage of capacity for Head & Neck Cancer service**

Due to a shortage of head and neck consultants at Nottingham Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH), system partners have taken the decision to divert referrals for the two week wait and benign head and neck cancer service to other centres outside of Nottingham with immediate effect.

As you may be aware, there is a national shortage of consultants in this field, with particular challenges in the East Midlands. From 19 May, NUH will have just one full-time consultant head and neck surgeon, against an establishment of four.

Extensive efforts have been made to recruit replacements over the last 18 months, with one consultant due to take up a post in September and a further consultant due to join the Trust in August 2019 (subject to completion of a fellowship).

However, regrettably the Trust has been left with little option but to divert some head & neck referrals to other centres in the short-term to avoid patients who may have a cancer diagnosis experiencing unacceptably long waits.

Please be assured that the health system across the East Midlands is working together to ensure patients have timely access to care which is provided in a planned and co-ordinated manner. We are taking various actions in mitigation of the shortage of capacity:

- We have asked GPs across greater Nottingham (outside the city) to refer all two week wait and benign head and neck service pathway patients direct to other neighbouring centres (Derby, Leicester, Sherwood Forrest) for their care.
- We have also agreed to prioritise the limited capacity towards patients from Nottingham city. This decision is based on their proximity, levels of deprivation and challenges of travelling further afield.
- NUH continues to proactively recruit for locum and permanent head and neck consultant surgeons in this field and will fill any vacancies if suitable candidates are found.
- Meetings have taken place with Clinical Leads from across the East Midlands to understand capacity and patient pathways in these exceptional circumstances.
- Conference calls are taking place on a daily basis over the next two weeks to review the position (waiting times, flow to other units, sourcing of capacity etc); these calls include colleagues from CCGs, NUH and NHS Improvement, plus there is a weekly oversight meeting chaired by Wendy Saviour, Managing Director of the STP.

We will of course continue to keep you informed as there are developments.

Lewis Etoria, Head of Engagement and Communications  
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