

HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 7 DECEMBER 2023

IN HOSPITAL UPDATE ON IMPROVING PATIENT FLOW AND THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

Summary

1. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) has requested a progress report on in-hospital patient flow, including the impact of the new Emergency Department (ED) on ambulance hospital handover delays.
2. Representatives from Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (WAHT), NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB), and West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust (WMAS) have been invited to attend this meeting.

Scrutiny Background

3. A Scrutiny Task Group looking at ambulance handover delays was carried out in November 2021 and since that time the Committee has monitored patient flow and the impact on ambulance hospital handover delays.
4. The Committee remains concerned about the situation in Worcestershire and has requested regular updates on patient flow, the most recent of which was on [15 June 2023](#)

Context

5. The new Emergency Department (ED) at Worcestershire Royal Hospital (WRH) opened to patients on 16 October.
6. The move followed several years of planning and construction by Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (WAHT) and marked the final phase of a £35 million capital investment to bring together, over two floors in the Aconbury East block the Emergency Department, Acute Medical Unit (AMU) and Medical Same Day Emergency Care Unit (MSDEC).
7. The new ED, which occupies the ground floor of Aconbury East, offers significant improvements in terms of quality, safety, patient experience and staff working conditions compared to the old ED in the main WRH building.
8. However, further work across a range of services is under way to tackle the issues of ambulance handover delays and long waits for patients in need of urgent care – issues which HOSC members have been monitoring for some time.

9. Appendix 1 provides data to update the HOSC on A&E attendances across WAHT, demand and improved flow and discharges.

The New Emergency Department (ED)

10. Features of the new ED include:

- Dedicated CT scanner and other imaging facilities
- Enhanced resuscitation and majors areas as part of an improved layout to support patient flow through the department
- A separate paediatric ED with dedicated entrance, which is co-located with, and has access to the minors department (80% of paediatric activity is minor illness)
- Ability to compartmentalise the department to allow for safe separation of services in the event of a future pandemic or infection control issues
- There is direct offload into purpose-built ambulance offload area (RAT) as well as additional Triage in both adults and paediatrics to meet the predicted increase in the number of 'walk in' attendances.

Support for New Ways of Working

11. The new ED has enabled new ways of working, and this is supported by:

- The co-location with the AMU and Medical SDEC offers the teams across those two floors opportunities to develop new ways of working and an increased 'home first' focus – particularly important for getting frail older patients back home, or back to the place they call home, without needing to admit them to hospital (avoiding all the risks of being in hospital).
- The layout and design of the new department, specifically the RAT area allows for speedier processing by the ED team. It has also enabled the team to use areas flexibly, such as ambulatory majors and provided a more suitable environment for those patients who would not be suitable for SDEC, but do not need a trolley. The team, whilst still adapting to new practice, are now using alternative areas in the department to support offloading.
- The introduction of streaming directly from ambulances to MSDEC provides a further opportunity to streamline ambulance handover.
- The development and co-location with the Elgar Unit enables direct streaming to that mental health facility.
- With the development of the Single Point of Access (SPOA) from December 2023, streaming will be increased using the directory of services through the SPOA, connecting with community hubs and Age UK and voluntary sector support and into the newly developing Frailty service.

Patient Experience

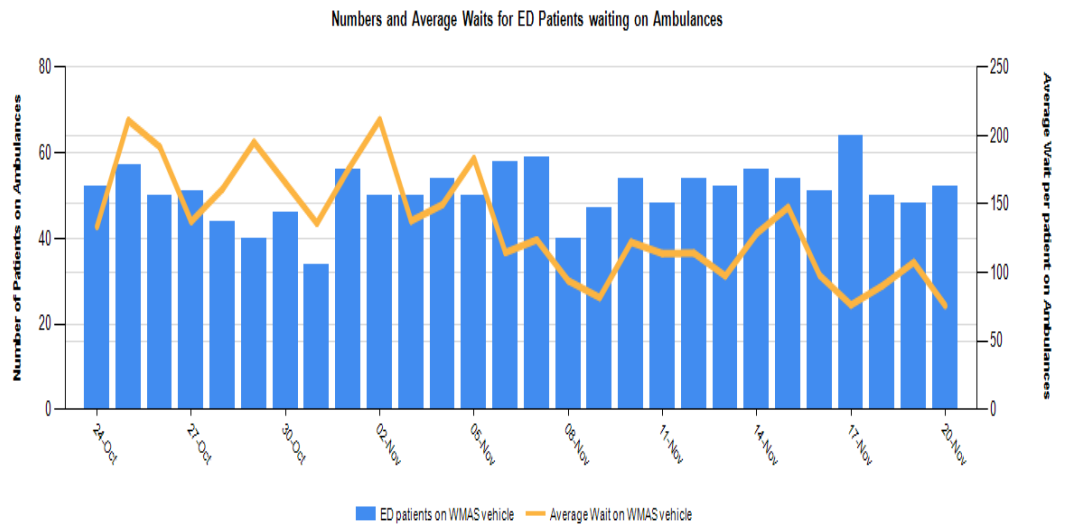
- The new design includes a focus on patient experience including a more spacious waiting area; the introduction of Play Therapists for paediatric patients; a dedicated specialist Child and Adolescent

Mental Health Services (CAMHS) assessment room to assess patients in tailored environment.

- The department also delivers improved privacy and dignity and improved facilities for families and bereavement support.
- 'Finishing touches' including interior and exterior artwork were made possible by a hugely successful fundraising appeal run by Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Charity and generously supported by local people.

Ambulance Handover Delays

12. Notwithstanding the benefits of the new ED outlined above, the new department on its own cannot prove a complete solution to the issue of ambulance handovers. Further work is needed elsewhere in WAHT and across the local health and care system. For WAHT, focus is being applied to a range of programmes of work to improve flow through the organisation and reduce the length of stay.
13. The work to improve flow is ongoing with a number of different workstreams linked to admission prevention and early and timely discharge including:
 - Greater use of Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) services, including a Cardiology SDEC service currently being piloted in the old ED at Worcestershire Royal Hospital – helping to divert around 20 patients a day from ED or via direct referral from NHS111/GPs.
 - Weekend operating model has been amended to support increased discharges. Early data suggest a significant increase in discharges at the weekend.
 - A new Single Point of Access (Spa) service goes live in December 2023 which provides a single telephone number into the system for NHS111, GPs and other primary care staff and ambulance crews to identify the most suitable service for patients to access rather than the ED. It will also support the use of virtual wards to support early discharge and escalations.
 - Work within WAHT to improve discharge planning and documentation, give more timely access to medicines needed for a patient to take home (TTOs) and improve access to pre-discharge physiotherapy and occupational therapy support.
 - System wide initiatives to reduce ED attendances, reduce admissions and improve the discharge of patients going home without support ('Simple' or Pathway 0 discharges) and those requiring additional support at home or in an alternative care setting (Pathway 1, 2 and 3 Discharges).
 - Internal and external communications including the 'Home for Lunch' campaign to raise awareness.
14. There is more that WAHT can do to reduce delays, and that will remain a priority throughout the winter period and beyond.
15. However, the chart below shows a recent improvement in protracted delays rather than the number of actual delays. This means that on average ambulance handover delays are getting shorter in duration.



Current challenges

- Handover delays continue although improvements are being seen (see appendix 1).
- This is due in part to reduced ambulance activity being offset by high numbers of patients coming in by other means, often with serious illness or injury.
- Operational challenges and high workload for ED staff continues to impact on their physical and mental wellbeing.
- The winter period generally brings additional challenges due to seasonal illnesses (including increasing rates of Covid).

Purpose of the Meeting

16. The HOSC is asked to:

- consider and comment on the information provided on in hospital patient flow and the new ED; and
- determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Papers

Appendix 1 – Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust-wide Data

Contact Point

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case, the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda and Minutes of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 June and 10 February 2023, 1 December, 17 October, 8 July, 9 May and 9 March 2022, 18 October 2021, 27 June 2019, 14 March 2018 and 11 January 2017

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)