

To: Patient Groups and forums, voluntary sector organisations and local councillors across Dudley, Walsall, and Wolverhampton areas

NHS Dudley
St John's House
Union Street
Dudley DY2 8PP

9th September 2011

Dear Reader,

Plans to change Vascular Surgery in the Black Country

May I start by apologising for the length of this letter. It does offer some important information and also seeks your views. I hope you can forgive how long this takes.

This letter seeks to do three things:

1. To tell you about the plans to create a specialist centre for vascular surgery to serve people living in Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton and surrounding areas.
2. To let you know about the process to choose which hospital will run this centre.
3. To ask for your views about the information we should take into account when choosing which hospital should be the centre.

These plans do not cover the Sandwell area. Similar plans for Sandwell and Birmingham will be considered as part of a separate review.

1. Plans for a specialist centre for vascular surgery

Vascular surgery includes operations on blood vessels. There are several types of surgery depending on the type of illness someone has. For example, one major type of surgery deals with the main artery in the abdomen when there is a risk of it bursting. Another procedure is used to prevent stroke by repairing the artery which supplies the brain with blood.

At the moment these procedures are carried out at 3 separate hospital sites – Russell's Hall Hospital in Dudley; New Cross Hospital in Wolverhampton; and Manor Hospital in Walsall. However, evidence demonstrates that outcomes for patients are significantly improved when vascular surgery is carried out in a single centre covering a population of at least 800,000 people. Together, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton have a total population which meets this requirement. Similar plans are being made all over the country so that people whose main artery is at risk of bursting can be detected by screening and their treatment planned, instead of it becoming a life threatening emergency. Patients treated at specialist centres have a significantly reduced chance of dying or having a complication as a result of their operation. A specialist centre enables all the staff involved – surgeons, anaesthetists, radiologists and nurses - to develop and maintain their skills to the highest level, and to operate in an environment which has better facilities. Although each hospital seeks to use best practice, none of the three hospitals can meet the quality standards with the current arrangement of services.



The plans include:

- A screening programme for the major vascular condition ‘abdominal aortic aneurysm’ or ‘AAA’. This will enable early detection of the need for surgery before the artery reaches the stage where it might burst. Men aged 65 will be invited for screening at a site in their local community. If they are found to have an aneurysm they will be referred to the specialist centre for assessment and treatment.
- A new vascular surgery specialist centre will be located at one of the three hospital sites in Dudley, Walsall, or Wolverhampton.
- Out-patients; investigations such as blood flow checks; day case procedures and some less complex surgery will continue to be carried out at the local hospital site.

2. How will the specialist centre site be chosen?

A vascular review project team has been set up to manage this process and includes people drawn from the Primary Care Trusts in Walsall, Wolverhampton, and Dudley. The team is working closely with doctors, surgeons, and other healthcare professionals with the appropriate knowledge and skills to ensure that the process of choosing the specialist centre site will be a fair and open one; that the site has the right facilities needed to meet quality standards; and that it is run by an organisation which will employ highly skilled health care professionals to run it.

Each hospital will be invited to ‘tender’ (bid) to provide the specialist centre through a formal procurement process. This means that each hospital will need to show that it can carry out all the procedures required to run the centre to the required standards. These are set out in the service specification.

The service specification

This sets out all the requirements for the vascular centre, and for the support services needed at all three hospital sites so that patients can still access outpatient and day-case appointments locally.

The service specification insists that the hospital seeking to be the specialist centre must meet a range of quality standards, can act on the findings of national published audits, and can follow professional guidance (for example from NICE – the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence).

The service specification ensures that the staff employed have the right skills and will continue to develop them as procedures and technologies change. It ensures that the attitude towards patients is sympathetic and caring and that patients are properly informed - without jargon – and listened to. The successful site will be expected to have systems in place to find out about patients’ experiences, to make sure they understand what patients are saying, and to learn from them, especially if anything needs to be put right.

The service specification also ensures that the vascular centre will be properly managed – covering people and buildings and equipment, and that managers have suitable financial skills. It will also have to regularly demonstrate its performance so that the commitment to patients to improve clinical outcomes does actually happen.

The tender process

Each of the three hospitals will be invited to bid from the end of September, with a decision made about the successful hospital by early December. Once the bids are received, they will need to be tested (or evaluated) to make sure that the claims made by each hospital in meeting the service specification are true, and also to compare how good each hospital is in meeting each requirement. Each bid will be given a score by members of an evaluation team. This will include experts from outside the West Midlands to ensure that the assessment is considered by independent people. The bid with the highest overall score will be awarded the contract to provide the specialist centre from April 2012.

3. Your views

The Vascular Review Project Team is keen to hear what you feel about these plans, and to answer any questions you have about the proposals. In particular, we would like to know if there are things you feel we should take into account when making the decision about which hospital site to choose to run the new vascular centre? For example, are there any specific questions you feel that we should ask as part of the tender evaluation process? All views or comments received will be recorded and all will be taken into account as part of the procurement process. The project team will also produce a summary report of the comments received, along with how they were used, and this will be sent out to all recipients of this letter by mid-November.

If you have specific comments to make about the tender process and any suggestions for questions we should include, please contact us by 20th September 2011

For all other comments about the plans for a vascular surgery centre please contact us by the end of October 2011.

To contact us

DUDLEY residents please contact

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e-mail: steve.corton@dudley.nhs.uk

Address: NHS Dudley, St John's House, Union Street, Dudley DY2 8PP

heart of
local health



WALSALL residents please contact

Karen Goldsmith, Involvement Team, NHS Walsall

Telephone: 01922 618380

e-mail: Karen.goldsmith@walsall.nhs.uk

Address: NHS Walsall, Jubilee House, Bloxwich Lane WS2 7JL

WOLVERHAMPTON residents please contact

Tracy Cresswell, Community Engagement Officer, Wolverhampton City PCT.

Telephone: 01902 445894

e-mail: Tracy.Cresswell@wolvespct.nhs.uk

Address: Wolverhampton City Primary Care Trust, Coniston House, Chapel Ash, Wolverhampton WV3 0XE.

Further Information

If you would like to see a copy of the service specification, the quality standards or require any other background information on the plans, then please contact me on the number above.

If you've reached this far, Thank you for your patience and your interest.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Corton, Head of Community Engagement
NHS Dudley
(on behalf of the Vascular Review Project Team).

