

HEALTH MEETING. FRIDAY 20 AUGUST, 2021 - 9.00am to 9.50am

Present: Cllr Ian Wilkes, Andrew Bird, Geoff Durham, Tracey Shewan CCG

Apologies Denise French

Notes of quarterly meeting held with Chair and Vice Chair of HW&P scrutiny committee and the CCU.

Tracey Shewan gave an update on the current situation with Covid: Currently, in Newcastle over a 7 day period, the number of cases were 270.8 per 100,000 population with the latest figures standing at 300 per 100,000. The current hospital bed occupancy in Stoke was 50-55 people with Covid and 14-15 people in ITU receiving critical care. The number of infections were reaching the level of the second wave but the levels of hospital admissions were not at that level. The people being admitted to hospital were mainly non-vaccinated or those who had received their first dose although there were some who had had both and it was mainly younger people being admitted. This included children with a respiratory virus rather than Covid.

ITU was currently over capacity, at 150% but these were non-covid cases.

The hospital was under a lot of pressure. Last Monday, (16th August), 6 ambulances waited for up to 6 hours to admit their patient into the hospital although they were receiving medical attention inside the ambulances.

Primary care was also struggling with 33% of people struggling to get through to their GP surgery or get an appointment. Extra phone lines have been set up as there were more telephone consultations being carried out as opposed to face to face.

Currently there were 48% face to face consultations and 52% telephone. This compared to 2019 at 89% face to face and 11% telephone and in March, 2020, the start of the Covid pandemic, 56% face to face and 44% telephone consultations took place.

In terms of hospital waits, before the pandemic there were no 52 week waits for treatment. This now stood at 6000 – a backlog of 18 months, which will take between 2 and 4 years to clear.

Tracey stated that there were concerns regarding Covid when the schools returned in the autumn. The Delta variant is very transmissible but with 2 vaccinations, the likelihood of hospitalisation remains low. There was a need to get 16 year olds vaccinated before returning to school, and this is a priority, with a number of walk-in centres operating.

Councillor Ian Wilkes asked about the people who didn't want to wear masks, or be vaccinated. Tracey Shewan advised that Covid had affected different populations, and their attitude towards it. In ITU in the first wave there was high proportion of overweight Asian males. As vaccines started to be rolled out, generally the majority of the population were quick to come forward to receive the vaccine. However some groups were more reluctant, and did not come forward. There was a fear amongst pregnant women that the vaccine could harm their baby or make them infertile. There was no evidence of this but pregnant, unvaccinated women could be affected more by the virus in terms of symptoms. They are being encouraged to receive the vaccine when attending anti-natal clinics. There were currently three pregnant women in ITU who had not received the vaccination

With the vast majority of the population now vaccinated, the NHS is moving into phase three of the vaccination programme, which is the booster/flu vaccinations. There has to be a 6 month gap between the second COVID vaccine and the booster and although the Covid and flu vaccines could theoretically be given together, due to timelines of receiving the vaccine that may need to be staggered. A big increase in flu cases was expected this year as social distancing requirements disappear, and people begin to meet up again.

In terms of encouraging the younger population to receive the vaccine, walk in centres would be better than appointments as these could be easily forgotten or missed. The 'Together We're Better' website gave a list of walk in centres for people aged 16 and over.

Councillor Wilkes asked what current recruitment was like within the NHS, and was advised that it takes 6 years to train a doctor and 3 years for a paramedic/nurse, so it's a long term issue to be addressed. The current difficulty is recruiting midwives. This was currently being looked into, looking at different ways of working, with the possibility of 'on demand' rather than free-standing birthing units.

Obesity remains one of the largest challenges with regard to the health and wellbeing of the population, and the NHS are looking to do more on the prevention front. There is a need to educate people into staying healthy. Obesity is a major problem at present and Tracey referred to Paul McKenna's quote that people eat and drink to make them feel better but this could have the opposite effect.

Meetings had been held with the County Council and urgent emergency care was being looked at. The 111 service was also being promoted.

Discussion took place on what more we as the Council can do to encourage our employees who have not yet had the vaccine for whatever reason? Tracy stated that it would be really helpful in the first instance to understand the reasons why people are reluctant or refusing to have the vaccine. The NHS really need to understand these reasons, and Tracy asked that any information s to the reasons the Council can provide, would be really useful in providing the NHS with useful data which in turn would allow them to develop communications which are more effective at reaching out to people who remain cautious, and trying to alleviate their fears.

