

PURPOSE

This report represents a request for Phlebotomy services and access to Bradwell to be brought before a Health Scrutiny Committee. It could be either Newcastle or Staffordshire, that decision needs to be agreed with officers. Any scrutiny should involve Stoke Health Scrutiny as many of the users of the services are based in Stoke. These services have received some scrutiny from Newcastle, but we have yet to get to the bottom of some of the issues. If Newcastle is to continue with the scrutiny it needs to be done in conjunction with Staffordshire.

INTRODUCTION

The new phlebotomy available to residents of North Staffordshire are designed (sic) with no concern as to how patients are going to access them, or how convenient they are for patients.

The previous service relied heavily on the Path Lab. As a user of the service I was amazed at the number of users who were prepared to come in off the street and wait for long periods. It is now becoming obvious that many of the alternative services are restricted. It is one thing to produce an impressive list of centres offering phlebotomy services. It is another thing to produce a list showing how accessible they are and how available to the general public.

That patients were prepared to wait for long periods at the Path Lab for the walk in service is an indicator that the community services were not working. It is doubtful if they are now.

A number of users have complained verbally to me. However I will use two examples to make my point. One is my own experience and the other is in an e-mail, reproduced below, from a user of the service.

BRADWELL

Before looking at the Phlebotomy service the author will address the Bradwell issue.

It would be very difficult to locate in Newcastle a more inaccessible site (by public transport) for a community health service than Bradwell. On the other hand it would be difficult to find many sites with better public transport than the current Out Patients unit. The reference made to the bus service for Bradwell in publicity by the trust is an insult. It is written by those who do not use buses. Four a day plus a rush hour service is not an adequate bus service.

Any design for a community health facility that took user convenience into account would have vetoed Bradwell from the start. Bradwell is valuable housing development land, and it should have been sold with the community facility developed on the current out patients site.

Those who are suffering are the vulnerable in our society. Elderly, sick, frequently poor and reliant on inadequate public transport, or expensive taxis. This type of person will have difficulty in finding a route by which to voice their concerns. The outcome can be predicted. Fewer people will attend the service and there will be more missed appointments. The general health in the area will deteriorate as a result.

PHLEBOTOMY EXPERIENCE

Cllr David Becket

I suffer from Polycythaemia, which was diagnosed some three years ago. I attend clinics at the UHNS every three months, which requires a blood test to be taken before the clinic. I have one to three Venesections between clinics.

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Until now it was a simple process. I arrived at the Path Lab half an hour before the clinic, where the blood test was taken. After the consultation I would arrange venesection appointments on the spot. No problems, this was an efficient process.

Venesection ceased at UHNS late last year. Following the visit to the consultant a nurse then has to phone up to make an appointment for me. This usually involves faxing the prescription through. This takes at least ten minutes, with fifteen the norm. What a total waste of nursing time! Of my five community appointments to date one was subsequently cancelled. No appointment at UHNS was ever cancelled.

Blood testing is no better. I am told that I have two choices. Turn up at the new Path Lab TWO hours before the appointment, or make an appointment at another centre. The second option gives me two journeys instead of one.

I am now learning that this second option is not always easy to access, though in my case my GP will provide a by appointment service.

Mrs M Brown

David

I'm contacting you to let you know of the difficulties being experienced by myself, Selwyn and older people in the Clayton area since the closure of the Path Lab in Hartshill.

Our doctor has a very limited blood testing service available and at the moment they are taking on no 'new' cases, unless the need is extreme. We have all been given directions to go to Bradwell or one of the other clinics, e.g. Ryecroft, Milehouse, etc. When the test is needed immediately you only have recourse to Bradwell.

Going to Bradwell when you have no transport of your own is a nightmare and so most people have to take a taxi, there and back - this can be costly. I think the average price from Clayton is something like £5 each trip - so £10 just to have your blood tested! Although the handout given by the Path Lab to regulars like myself for Bradwell speaks of two buses that pass the door, these services are not regular. One runs every hour in the morning and the other one runs every two hours at peak times. On the way there you get off walk up the hill and then attempt to cross the A34. Coming back the bus stop is not adjacent to the hospital. For older people with walking problems it is not feasible.

The other clinics run an appointment system and the waiting time for the blood test is something between 10 and 20 working days. This does not always fit in with the requirements of the doctor. (On a personal note I'm classed as a non-bleeder and have been told that I cannot attend Milehouse as they have been unsuccessful in obtaining blood from me.) Patients are given follow-up appointments by their doctor and find that they cannot get their blood tested until after the follow-up appointment - ridiculous and time wasting for all concerned!

Just so that I'm not considered as ageist, may I say that I've heard complaints from younger people, who have not transport of their own of the difficulty in getting to Bradwell for an immediate blood test.

What is needed is an accessible walk-in blood testing facility and one that does not present the problems of crossing the A34.

Yours,

Mavis Brown

LOCATIONS

The services previously available at the UHNS are now provided at five centres, Middleport (Monday and part Tuesday), Cheadle (Tuesday), Bradwell (Wednesday), Shelton (Thursday and part Wednesday), Fenton (Friday).

For patients who require occasional visits this mix of centres is an advantage, as they can choose the most convenient centre. However are there procedures that require attendance on consecutive days, and if so are they required to attend different centres? For example a three-day procedure Monday to Wednesday could mean attendance at Middleport, Cheadle and Bradwell.

SCRUTINY REQUIRED

This service needs in depth scrutiny. It is not good enough to produce a list of centres offering the service, details of the level of service offered must be included. Some markers need to be put down, for example the numbers attending blood tests before the change over, and their location, compared with the current situation. A survey of users would be helpful.

Scrutiny must address the following questions;

Phlebotomy

1. Has the budget for this service followed the service from the hospital to the community?
2. Are GPs paid for the offering the service?
3. What improvements have been made to the community service? (Details are required, not just a list of centres. For each location times of opening, pre booking times, walk in service details, must be provided. In addition improvements since the closure of the hospital service must be recorded.
4. Are some centres placing restrictions on “new” patients who require the service?
5. How many blood tests were carried out (on a monthly basis over the last six months) in the community?
6. How many were carried out at UHNS?
7. What is the monthly rate of blood tests now?
8. How many complaints have been received about the new service?
9. What is the current rate of missed appointments for the Phlebotomy service?
10. How does the current rate compare with that of a year ago?
11. What is the current rate of cancelled appointments (by the service)?
12. How does current rate compare with that of a year ago?
13. Are there procedures requiring attendance on consecutive days, if so how will this service be provided.

Bradwell

14. Are there guidelines covering the accessibility of Community Hospitals to Public Transport?
15. If yes have these been followed?
16. Was public transport accessibility taken into account when planning the extended services at Bradwell?
17. Will the trust take steps to make access by public transport as easy as it is to General Out Patients (i.e by commissioning a community transport service between the bus station and Bradwell)?

STANDARD OF MEDICAL CARE

In my experience the standard of medical care has been excellent. I have every faith in the staff providing care at UHNS and in the community. My concern is the management infrastructure in which they work, and the consideration shown to patients by that infrastructure.

Cllr David Becket
Chairman Newcastle Health Scrutiny Committee,
Member Staffordshire Health Scrutiny Committee

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Cllr David Becket **April 2012**

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