

Briefing note in respect of Charter House, Trowbridge

1. There has been increasing concern over the continued use of Charter House as an in-patient unit due to concerns as to our ability to provide adequate quality of care. As a result I visited the building to assess the position and decided that we could not longer provide a viable service of sufficient quality. It would not pass the 'would you admit your relatives to this ward' test.
2. Delivering the quality of care which we would all support requires good observation, therapeutic space, space to wander and space to be quiet, all of which are constrained by the lay-out of the building. The stand alone nature of the site is not helpful, nor is its proximity to a drug problem which could impact on visitors and staff.
3. These difficulties are compounded by problems re flooring, damp, a strong smell of sewage and leaking ceilings and walls. An independent engineer's report suggests that these cannot be easily fixed.
4. Recruitment difficulties mean that we are unable to provide consistent care with a team of staff who know the patients and so can effectively plan the care.
5. While demand for dementia care is increasing, the demand for in-patient dementia beds is falling in Wiltshire and elsewhere due to more care being provided in the community, both at home and in care homes. Beds are occupied for shorter periods as we see, treat and move people to the most appropriate care location more swiftly.
6. As the demand for dementia support in the community increases, it is essential that we ensure the greatest proportion of available funds is invested in community support services. In Wiltshire, the reverse has been the case with a disproportionate amount being spent in providing beds for a few, at the expense of the community services which support many more people in need of help.
7. In the weeks before deciding to suspend admissions, the number of service users fell, reaching the point where the in-patient unit was neither economically viable nor able to provide the desired quality of care. When I visited Charter House, there were, for example, more staff than service users.
8. The majority of patients in Charter House had been assessed and were awaiting an alternative placement, which can take some weeks to arrange resulting in delays in patients being discharged.
9. Notwithstanding this decision to suspend admissions, Charter House continues to be the team base for serving the population of Trowbridge and West Wiltshire as well as providing out-patient clinics. We are looking at how space in Charter House might be used to provide additional memory clinics which will reduce the waiting times for assessment and treatment in line with national targets.
10. Once the decision to suspend admissions was taken, discussions were held with service users and their carers and families and all have now been discharged in accordance with their care plans to alternative accommodation. Anyone needing an assessment bed while admissions are suspended will be accommodated in Salisbury or Bath (and possibly Swindon). There are no other changes in services to Trowbridge residents.
11. As the future usage of Charter House is considered, we will keep all our partners fully briefed and will fully engage with them in any decisions. We are happy to discuss bringing the in-patient unit back into use but only if we can provide consistent high standards of care.
12. No final decision will be made until after the review designed to look at the whole model of care provision for people with dementia in Wiltshire has been completed.

Iain Tulley
Chief Executive
AWP