

Chairman's bulletin

June 2015

Dear member

Our board of directors meet around six times a year to discuss performance, new developments and make decisions on how the trust is run. I wanted to be able to share with you an update from our latest board of directors' meeting. I hope you find this bulletin informative. I will be writing to you after every board meeting. If you have any comments about the format or content please contact the private office.

Care Quality Commission visit - 7-10 July

We continue to prepare for the visit from the CQC which will take place in July. We had a board seminar on 21 May to go through the five domains of the visit, ie safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led.

In her report to the board, director of nursing, patient safety and quality Cath Siddle said she was very grateful to and proud of everyone who has been involved in gathering information and assessing their services. She said the response from colleagues has been amazing and the board also wants to thank everyone for their hard work and enthusiasm as we prepare for the visit.

Services have been assessing themselves and the board saw these assessments at one of our regular seminars. They bring into focus the quality and depth of the work which is going on, day in day out, in this organisation which contributes to good patient care. A significant amount of work goes unseen but nevertheless is very important.

We are looking forward to the visit and see it as an opportunity to show our visitors the good work we are doing to care for patients.

MRSA and Clostridium Difficile (CDiff)

It is now around 150 days since there was a case of MRSA bacteraemia identified in the trust.

As you know from previous briefings we have a very tight tolerance for CDiff; we are only allowed to have 13 cases this year. Last year we had 20 cases out of the 40 we were allowed. In April we had four cases and it looks like we have another four in May so this is well above where we would like to be only two months into the year.

There is no one cause of the figures going up but we are making sure our staff:

- use the most appropriate antibiotics
- make sure their hand hygiene standards are the very best they can be
- keep areas clean and clear of clutter

If you are coming into the hospital or any of our community premises please help us by ensuring you wash or clean your hands.

Staff and patient experience and quality standards visits

As you know we hold regular staff and patient experience and quality standards visits in our wards and departments, as well as in the community. The visits are led by the director of nursing, patient safety and quality Cath Siddle and her senior nursing team. Twenty six wards and areas out of the 45 which were visited scored 100%. This is a fantastic achievement. Since these visits began in 2011/12 the scores have shown, thanks to our staff's hard work and commitment, a gradual improvement in all areas.

Our performance

Over the last year we have, in three out of four quarters, achieved the 95 per cent A and E target. While it's disappointing this target was missed – albeit missed only by a very small margin – the board thanked and congratulated staff for this tremendous performance and despite this we are still performing far better than many other trusts in the region and the country.

In April the accident and emergency performance was above the 95% national standard at 95.48% of patients being seen, treated admitted or discharged within four hours.

Thanks to the hard work of staff we achieved all but one of the cancer targets. We have targets for 14 days, 31 days and 62 days; we did not achieve the 62 day target but often this is because patients are being treated by ourselves and a tertiary (specialist) centre.

We are above the national average for patients being referred in and having their procedure or treatment within 18 weeks.

The board knows this doesn't happen without an immense amount of careful management. I thanked staff on behalf of the board for everything they're doing to ensure patients are seen as quickly as possible.

Operational efficiencies report

Chief operating officer and deputy chief executive Julie Gillon presented her annual report on operational efficiencies to the board.

The report gives the board a view of the work which has been going on during the year to improve in a number of areas. It also looks at the progress made since the figures started to be collected, for example:

- day case surgery which has gone from being 66.5% in 2010/11 to 87.1% at the end of 2014/15
- average lengths of stay have gone down from 4.4 days to 3.8 days in emergency care since 2006/7 and from 3.1 days to 2.9 days in elective (planned) care
- average did not attend for new appointments have gone down from 8.7% to 6.8% since 2006/7 and, for review appointments, from 13.4% to 10.3% in the same time period
- district nursing has a higher than national average level of face to face time with patients, though it is also nationally benchmarked as being more expensive. We think this is due to the levels of deprivation in our area
- in contrast adult physiotherapy services have fewer face to face contacts than the national average but their contacts per patients are higher than the national average

In her report Julie placed on record her thanks for the amount of hard work and effort taken by staff right across the trust to continuously improve efficiency.

Winter

Winter pressure comes every year and we are learning from the last winter to put in plans for the next one. However we also know that the whole system has to work effectively and our focus this year will be very much on working with our health and social care partners to improve care and services, particularly for older people who are frail and living with a number of medical conditions.

After what has been the busiest winter we have seen for many years the bed base in the trust has been reviewed. Twenty two additional beds are to be added to medicine to meet rising demand. There will be a reduction of 15 beds in elective care and four paediatric (children's) beds.

Mortality

As you know our mortality figures in the trust are higher than expected.

These figures are not in line with the performance and care we see elsewhere in the trust so we need to get to the bottom of them, understand why they are happening and, most importantly, improve them.

A great deal of work is continuing in areas such as the care of people with pneumonia, patients who are at the end of their lives, record keeping and coding.

Nurse and midwifery staffing levels

After the Francis Report, the Berwick Report and Keogh Review, England's chief nursing officer Jane Cummings worked with the National Quality Board to produce a guide to nurse and midwifery staffing. In her report to the board, director of nursing, patient safety and quality Cath Siddle presented the latest report which shows the breakdown of nurse and midwifery staffing in January this year.

Cath's Red Rules for rostering and setting the establishment were presented to the board. They show clearly what must be considered when deciding on how much staffing resource is needed for each area. As a result of this work nursing resource has been added to wards 29 and 41.

If you would like to see a copy of the Red Rules please contact my office.

Equality and diversity report

Director of human resources and education Ann Burrell presented the annual equality and diversity report to the board. The report sets out the work done throughout the year to promote equality and diversity in the trust to both patients and staff.

It also contains many examples of work which was done, for example:

- the adult safeguarding team offers tours for patients who are anxious about coming into hospital. The tours give them the opportunity to see where they are going to be treated and meet some of the staff who will take care of them
- occupational therapist Helen Caudren, who works in the palliative care team, now has an iPad so she can show patients adaptations and equipment which may help them before it is ordered to ensure it is appropriate for their individual circumstances

Friends and family test

We have had some lovely comments alongside the ratings in the friends and family test. Here are just a few comments:

- All the staff are really good. They always take time for patients to make sure the right care is given. They are dedicated and very caring. I can't thank them enough.
- Everyone was friendly and pleasant even though they were busy. Everything was explained, every procedure went through in detail. A very traumatic experience but made easier by all the staff.
- The treatment I have had has been excellent. The strange equipment was explained to me and all done with compassion and humour. Bad news was given with great sympathy and good news with a punch in the air from nursing staff and doctors.

Carbon reduction report

Director of finance, ICT and support services Lynne Hodgson presented her annual report to the board. The report sets out how we spent £1.86m on gas and electricity during the year. We have set ourselves a target of reducing carbon emissions by 17% over five years. We have already achieved this through a number of measures, for example by installing:

- LED lighting in our car parks
- low energy lighting in wards, departments and corridors
- nightwatchman on PCs so they turn themselves off when not being used
- improvements to boilers and improved insulation

Money

We are now in the new financial year. As you know we are expecting to be £5m in deficit at the end of 2015/16. At the end of April our planned deficit was £330,000. However we were actually £1.5m in deficit, so already we are £1.2m behind where we planned to be. Some of this will be the effects of the pressure we were under in the last financial year.

We will still need to make efficiency savings of £10.9m this year so we need to continue to find new ways of working and cut out waste where we see it.

People

At the end of 2014/15 we had 5,393 members of staff, 80 more than the same time the previous year. If you convert this to whole time equivalents (by adding the part time and full time jobs together) the figure is 4,551 in March 2015 compared to 4,501 at the same time last year.

Sickness absence rose during the year but in April this year it has fallen. However the cost of sickness to the organisation was £106,000 higher than the previous year. The total cost of sickness to the trust is around £5m.

Training

We have very high levels of compliance with mandatory (essential) training, well above many organisations around us.

Feedback from medical education quality visits

We have received excellent feedback from recent quality visits from the Newcastle Medical School and the Northern Foundation School. The visits were looking at the training programmes for medical students in their third and final years and newly qualified foundation doctors. We are known regionally as a great place for medical students and doctors to train, and this is down to the quality of training and support they are given when they are with us.

The board papers

The board papers from the last board meeting are posted on our website when the minutes of the previous meeting are approved. If you would like to read the board papers please go to www.nth.nhs.uk/about/board-meetings.

Board meetings are held in public and you are welcome to attend. To find out more visit our website at www.nth.nhs.uk or to confirm your attendance please contact the private office on 01642 624060.