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NHS
North Tees and Hartlepool
NHS Foundation Trust

anthem

Hartlepool team thanks community

Our Hartlepool urgent care team is thanking our community, as the department marks its success. Read more on page 4.

Also in this issue:

The new tech speeding up lung cancer diagnoses

Nurse celebrates 50 years with NHS

The team working across hospitals to improve bowel care

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> The service is getting fab reviews and our teams are always looking to develop new services within the centre

Dear reader,

Welcome to the latest edition of Anthem.

There is so much fantastic work and so many brilliant things to tell you about from across University Hospitals Tees.

Lots of things are in place to prepare for the winter period to help cope with the extra pressure on services we see every year – and an exciting new service we plan to launch (to be announced soon!). As we do every year, we will be doing all we can to ensure staff have had their flu vaccine, as well as encouraging our vulnerable patients and families to do the same. A flu bug can be really serious and spread very quickly and – aside from the obvious impact it can have on those vulnerable patients we treat – it can also be very disruptive to our services.

Included in this issue are details about the Tees Valley Community Diagnostic Centre, which opened earlier this year to provide a convenient service to deliver health tests and scans. Since opening in our new state-of-the-art building in Stockton town centre, our teams have delivered thousands of tests and scans to our patients. The service is getting fab reviews and our teams are always looking to develop new services within the centre, including new liver and cardiology services. I am also told that we have record numbers of patients attending their appointments – an issue NHS services have found a challenge in the past. And this is no surprise to me – the service is easy to get to and is quick and convenient.

When we talk about group working, one of the key ambitions is to really create that close working across services and to have a consistent high-quality service for our patients. In this issue we have highlighted two really good examples of this. Over the last year our endoscopy teams have come together to run a regular multi-role meeting to discuss patients being treated for complex polyps – something which is proving successful (page 13). Meanwhile, our scoliosis teams are working together to help patients like Maisie who has had care across our services (page 12). This has spanned across diagnostics, physiotherapy, surgery, and post-op recovery – thanks to our joined-up approach.

You will also see information about a new role we have appointed into the group which shows our commitment to offering high quality care to members of our armed forces community. Hannah Robertson is our new Help for Heroes nurse and will be giving specialist support to patients and their loved ones.

As always, you will also find news about innovations and team successes across our patch in the Tees Valley, County Durham and North Yorkshire.

Please do share positive stories with us and we will look to include these in future issues.

Thanks for reading.

Stacey Hunter

GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Keep up-to-date with University Hospitals Tees

From career stories to innovations in patient care and more, follow University Hospitals Tees on social media to keep up with the latest news.

- LinkedIn: University Hospitals Tees
- TikTok: @UniversityHospitalsTees
- Instagram: @NorthTeesAndHartlepoolNHSFT

Hartlepool urgent treatment service team thanks community

Hartlepool's urgent care service is thanking the community for its support in using it for the right reasons – as it marks its success.

The Hartlepool urgent care team.

The urgent treatment centre at the University Hospital of Hartlepool is a GP and nurse practitioner service treating people with minor injuries and illnesses.

Since opening in 2016 it has been offering a 24-hours a day, seven days a week service for people needing urgent support who have been unable to gain access to their GP. The centre now sees more than 200 people coming through the doors for treatment every day.

The service is a joint collaboration between University Hospitals Tees, North East Ambulance Service and Hartlepool and Stockton Health GP Federation.

Nicola Grieves, head of nursing for urgent care services across University Hospitals Tees, said: "The service is very busy throughout the year.

"That's due to it being well known in our local community and the expertise of our team of health professionals in the service.

"People appreciate the fantastic care our staff give them, as we see in the many compliments we get. I want to thank people for using the service at the right times and for helping contribute to its success."

The centre – which includes experienced nurse practitioners and health support workers – can help people with issues including:

- Sprains or strains
- Suspected broken bones
- Grazes, burns and cuts
- Minor illness – for example sore throats, ear ache, eye conditions and stomach ache

The service is not there to deal with complex issues that require continuity. Unless there is an urgent need these conditions should be addressed by a person's own GP.

Mark Lauder, one of the nurse practitioners working in the service, said: "We are lucky to have an extremely experienced team here. We get a lot of thanks from local people who are very appreciative of what we do."

Lynn Morris, another of the service's nurse practitioners, added: "The team has a mass of experience – it is humbling to see colleagues working together so well and doing their absolute best for our patients."

If you need medical treatment, please visit NHS 111 or call 111. An experienced call handler will signpost you to the most appropriate service.

New robotic technology speeds up lung cancer diagnosis

The University Hospital of North Tees is the first in the region to pilot a 'game-changing' Ion robotic-assisted bronchoscope - meaning earlier, safer lung cancer diagnosis for patients across the North East and North Yorkshire.

The state of the-art tool, funded by the Northern Cancer Alliance, uses shape sensing technology to allow doctors to reach previously inaccessible areas of the lung - where over 70% of early lung cancers are typically found.

The service is currently delivered by a team of three chest physicians at the University Hospital of North Tees – respiratory consultants Dr Vandana Jeebun, Dr Julia Dunleavy and Dr Victor Chew – as well as Mr Ben Waterhouse, a thoracic surgeon based at The James Cook University Hospital.

Dr Jeebun said: "This is a game changer for patients not just in Teesside, but across the North East and North Yorkshire.

"Early diagnosis is critical to improving survival rates in lung cancer. The Ion system is supporting us in doing this. It's allowing us to diagnose earlier and more accurately, reducing the need for invasive procedures and also speeding up access to life saving treatment.

"We're incredibly grateful to the Northern Cancer Alliance for their funding. And to North Tees for making this vision a reality."

The procedure sees the bronchoscope inserted through a patient's mouth while under general anaesthetic.

Once inserted, the Ion system uses real time imaging and GPS-like navigation to guide clinicians to suspicious nodules quickly and precisely.

Dr Chew explains: "We recently had a case of a patient with a growing hamartoma – a benign lung lesion. They had been under observation for 18 months due to slight growth.

"Under the conventional pathway, this patient would have required a surgical biopsy – an invasive procedure with associated risks. With Ion, we were able to perform a minimally invasive biopsy, confirm the lesion's benign nature and spare the patient from unnecessary surgery."

Lung cancer is the third most common cancer in the UK, and the leading cause of cancer death. In the North East and North Yorkshire, rates are among the highest nationally.

Dr Jeebun continues: "The success of this pilot programme stands as a powerful testament to the strength of collaborative working across multiple disciplines. Their shared commitment to innovation and excellence has been instrumental in making the Ion system a reality for patients across the region.

"We are proud to be leading the way in robotic respiratory diagnostics for the wider community."

The robotic-assisted bronchoscope team.

Urology nurse specialist celebrating five decades and still passionate about the job

A nurse celebrating 50-years of service in the NHS is sharing how her passion for the job still keeps her working.

Sandra Brennan, a urology nurse specialist from Stockton, began her NHS career at the age of 17 in 1975, working as a ward hostess within the psychiatry department at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Sandra undertook her training from 1976 to 79 and once newly qualified, worked as a staff nurse in surgery. She admits that surgery has always had her heart.

Sandra said: "Nursing was something that I had always thought about pursuing as a career. I had always wanted to travel and I had originally looked at becoming a Queen Alexandra's Nurse, but they didn't provide state registered nurse (SRN) training."

A turning point in Sandra's career came when North Tees Health and Hartlepool and East Durham NHS Trust merged in 1999, when a chance vacancy saw Sandra decide to specialise within urology.

She continued: "When a urology post came up I thought about how this would be a new challenge. I knew I could progress to becoming an independent nurse prescriber providing nurse-led clinics, chemotherapy to patients and performing flexible cystoscopy and bladder biopsies, which is all part of my role now."

Sandra celebrates her 50 years with the NHS.

A young Sandra in her nursing uniform.

Sandra shared some of the changes she has seen over the years and took the time to reflect on just why she loves her job so much.

Sandra said: "I've seen quite a few changes in the care that we deliver, from foam dressings being replaced by vac dressing to the pilot of maggot therapy. I also remember being involved in some memorable projects, such as the introduction of new breast re-construction techniques.

"I honestly love my job. I've been supported all the way by my husband and family throughout my nursing career and I've worked with a lot of inspirational, dedicated and fantastic colleagues. It's the patients I care for and the people I work with that still keep me here now.

"How many people can say that they stay in a job for 50-years if they hate it?"

Maternity triage changes at local trust already benefitting mums-to-be

Pregnant women are now benefitting from an improved system of 24-hour support at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Women attending our maternity assessment unit will be assessed according to the Birmingham Symptom specific Obstetric Triage System, which identifies and classifies clinical urgency. They will be allocated a triaged status and treated in order of clinical priority, meaning those in the most need will be seen first.

First launched in May, the pilot scheme yielded some outstanding results in just 11 days:

- 252 women were seen in maternity triage with 92% having their initial assessment within 15 minutes, exceeding the standard of 90%
- Seven women were triaged as red with all seven receiving the required immediate care
- 50 women were triaged as orange (meaning ongoing care is required within 15 minutes) with 88% receiving this care, exceeding the standard of 80%
- 120 triaged as yellow (requiring ongoing care within 1 hour) with 98% receiving this care, exceeding the standard of 80%
- 75 triaged as green which (ongoing care within four hours) with 100% receiving this care, exceeding the standard of 80%

Thanks to the hard work and commitment of the maternity team, the service is now operating 24-hours a day.

Hannah Matthews, interim head of midwifery, said: "The 24 hour triage will have a huge, positive impact for the women in our region for years to come.

"I'd like to thank the maternity team who have put their commitment to our patients first and agreed to new working patterns and shifts in order to make our new 24 hour service possible."

Members of the maternity team.

NORTH TEES + HARTLEPOOL TOGETHER

Strictly Come Nursing: Nurses take to the dancefloor to raise money for hospital garden

A group of nurses are swapping their scrubs for dresses as they take on a charity dance competition to support the children they care for on their hospital ward.

The team on the children's ward at the University Hospital of North Tees are taking part in Nuvo Wellbeing's 'Strictly Nuvo' dance competition and fundraising gala this autumn. As well as competing, they are also raising money to transform an outdoor space into a therapeutic garden for young patients and their families.

The black tie event sees teams from across the region take to the dancefloor in support of the North Tees children's ward and Nuvo Wellbeing's 'N Dance Academies' – which delivers free dance, performance and confidence coaching for young people across the North East.

Alyson Thompson, matron of the children's ward, said: "We want children to have the best possible experience when they're in hospital and our big aim is to get them outside, getting some fresh air, having fun and enjoying a little bit of normality.

"It's hard being in hospital – I've been there with my own children – and just being able to have that bit of fun time outside, away from the confines of the ward, is really beneficial.

"None of us are dancers, we're all total beginners – particularly me with my two left feet – so it's been a real giggle. But we're trying hard because we're so passionate about raising this money to benefit the children that come to us.

"Any donations given in support of our garden will be hugely appreciated."

The garden is the team's most ambitious estates project yet. It comes after work to upgrade the ward's sensory playroom and reading area earlier this year.

Support the North Tees children's ward

If you would like to support Aly and the team, please scan the QR code to visit JustGiving:

Left to right: Children's ward matron Alyson Thompson, senior clinical matron for paediatrics Janice Atkinson and staff nurse Jade Jefferson.

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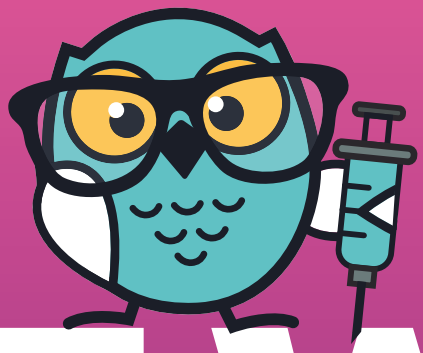

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North Tees and Hartlepool staff

South Tees Hospitals staff

HERE TO HELP

Specialist nursing role provides personalised care for the armed forces community

University Hospitals Tees has launched a pioneering initiative to provide more personalised patient care for its armed forces community.

Former British Army nurse Hannah Robertson was recently appointed as a Help for Heroes nurse for the hospital group.

Thanks to funding from Help for Heroes, Hannah can provide specialist clinical support and advice to the armed forces community which includes those who are currently serving or retired veterans, and their immediate family members.

She said: "I have been to visit several veterans who have all been so welcoming and keen to talk and share stories.

"Not all people need my help. Some just like to have a chat and tell me about their military careers, but for those who do find themselves in the position of needing extra support, it's been an honour to be able to co ordinate their care and be an advocate."

Hannah's role, which is fully funded by Help for Heroes, was created after the national charity identified a gap in support for members of the armed forces community with many veterans finding it difficult to engage with hospital services and treatment.

Due to injuries and other conditions from their time in service, they can often need additional support during treatment and after care.

Hannah previously served in the Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps for 14 years and worked as a clinical sister on the intensive care ward at James Cook before starting her new role.

She now works across University Hospitals Tees and acts as a liaison between healthcare services.

Using her military training and experience, she helps members of the armed forces community navigate the right care and support for their individual needs, whilst supporting staff with specialist training, guidance and resources.

Stuart Irvine, group director of risk, assurance and compliance said: "Having worked in both military and healthcare settings, Hannah has a wealth of experience and a real passion for helping others. That makes her the perfect fit for co ordinating personalised patient care for our armed forces community across University Hospitals Tees."

Hannah Robertson, Help for Heroes nurse.

Diagnostic centre carries out more than 15,000 health tests and checks – just months after opening

Since the Tees Valley Community Diagnostic Centre in Stockton Town Centre started to welcome its first patients earlier this year, it has been offering rapid tests for a range of health issues.

The site in Bridge Street offers a wide variety of diagnostic tests in one convenient location. These include CT and MRI scans, ultrasounds and X rays as well as a range of lung, heart and blood tests.

It will also soon be running new services to help patients with potential liver and cardiology issues – with all services being provided by staff across University Hospitals Tees.

Since opening in April, it has already performed more than 15,000 tests, checks and scans on patients from the local area.

Simon Milburn, clinical director for the service, said: "We are really pleased with the centre's success so far.

"Patients, their loved ones and our own staff are having a fantastic experience both being treated here and working here.

"It is a bright, spacious environment, away from the busy hospital setting, where our patients can have a better experience.

"Having the opportunity to bring teams from across University Hospitals Tees to work together has also been fantastic – sharing expertise and ways of working.

"We want the centre to be bigger and better, with plans to soon start a liver clinic with specialist fibroscan equipment and a new cardiology clinic."

Proud of success so far

Stacey Hunter, chief executive of University Hospitals Tees, who also attended the opening, added: "We are really proud to have one of the best diagnostic facilities in the country.

"It's also exciting to see how much more we can do from this site – with staff from across the group bringing together a huge range of expertise and knowledge.

"I'd like to thank everyone involved for this support so far, including everyone at Stockton on Tees Borough Council and to our local MPs and health groups."

Staff and stakeholders at the official opening of the Tees Valley Community Diagnostic Centre.

New initiative helps people with spinal curve condition

A new service is improving the detection and management of scoliosis in children and young people – reducing waiting times, streamlining surgical pathways and leading to better health outcomes for patients.

Maisie, a young university student, is one such success story. Diagnosed with scoliosis in late 2023 after a colleague noticed an unusual curvature in her back, Maisie was referred to a multidisciplinary scoliosis team spanning several hospital trusts. With a significant curve, her condition required corrective spinal surgery.

Thanks to coordinated care led by consultant spinal surgeon Mr Prasad Karpe and supported by community physiotherapist Sarah Robson, Maisie's journey from diagnosis to surgery was smooth, timely, and deeply supported.

Maisie said: "I was perfectly fine knowing I'd be seen across different hospitals – the University Hospital of North Tees first, then The James Cook University Hospital for the surgery.

"It was quicker, more efficient, and the care was exceptional. Now, I'm two inches taller and back into the fitness I love."

Mr Karpe, who performed Maisie's scoliosis surgery, is paediatric surgical lead at James Cook. He emphasised the broader impact: "Scoliosis doesn't always require surgery, but when it does, timely intervention and comprehensive care lead to exceptional outcomes. Collaboration is key."

Maisie's case reflects the wider ambition of the service, creating improved links between health services and a better experience for young people with spinal conditions.

The collaborative scoliosis team – spanning diagnostics, physiotherapy, surgery, and post op recovery – now stands as one of the models for future service integration across the region.

Maisie's message to newly diagnosed patients is clear: "Knowing that you are a scoliosis patient or living with scoliosis doesn't need to impact your life at all. Having the right treatment can positively improve your life.

"The surgery changed my life forever. The care team made me feel safe, supported and confident – start to finish."

To watch Maisie's story, please scan the QR code:

Maisie recently shared her story in a short film.

Bowel patients benefitting from new joint service – as health experts from across Teesside come together

Patients being treated for bowel issues in Teesside are benefiting from the expertise of clinical teams from across the region – thanks to a new joined NHS service.

Health professionals from across University Hospitals Tees meet weekly to discuss treatment for patients found to have large, complex colorectal polyps.

Polyps are small growths on the lining of the oesophagus (food pipe), stomach, the large intestine (colon) or rectum.

The complex polyp team is a meeting of specialists including surgeons, nurses, radiologists and pathologists.

Consultant gastroenterologist and endoscopy clinical lead Iosif Beintaris, consultant gastroenterologist John Jacob and advanced endoscopy practitioner Clare Westwood are among the key members of the multi disciplinary team, first set up in 2020 for patients across Stockton and Hartlepool. In 2024, this was then expanded to include clinicians from Middlesbrough and Northallerton to help patients in these areas.

Dr Beintaris said: "The team approach we have used is one of just a few nationally and has been very successful to date.

"Its purpose is to review patients with polyps and ensure that the right treatment is offered to the right patient, in a timely manner and a minimally invasive fashion.

"Endoscopic treatments are generally less traumatic than surgery, minimising a patient's hospital stay and saving resources for cases where surgery is the only option, including cancer."

In 2020 and 2021, the complex polyp team reviewed and managed 261 cases, the majority of which were treated with minimally invasive, organ sparing endoscopic procedures.

In 2023, the number of cases referred to the service and discussed increased to 275 and this number has increased further since the collaboration with teams across University Hospitals Tees.

Speaking about the partnership, Arvind Ramadas, clinical lead for endoscopy, said: "The combined complex polyp group has been very successful in bringing together expert multi professional teams, which ensures that each patient receives an evidence-based personalised treatment strategy.

"We look forward to establishing patient centred clinical pathways to deliver the highest quality endoscopy service across University Hospitals Tees."

Advanced endoscopy practitioner Clare Westwood and consultant gastroenterologist and endoscopy clinical lead Iosif Beintaris.

Teesside Together – new regional sexual health service launched

Residents in the local area can access new, improved sexual health services.

With four community-based clinics, a new website and helpline, Teesside Together's team of expert clinicians are on hand to offer support to improve all areas of sexual health. Services include clinics on both a referral and drop-in basis to offer advice, sexually transmitted infection testing and contraception.

The service will use the existing sexual health bases in Middlesbrough (Live Well Centre) and Redcar (Leisure and Community Heart Building), and new bases in Hartlepool (Park Towers) and Stockton (Endurance House).

Each hub will serve as a centre for local outreach programmes, with services delivered within their respective communities.

Teesside Together is provided by the Tees Alliance Partnership, which is led by University Hospitals Tees, Hartlepool and Stockton Health (H&SH) and ELM GP Federation. The new service will improve sexual health outcomes and support healthy sexual relationships across the Tees.

Open conversations

Vicky Holt, director of nursing from Hartlepool and Stockton Health, commented:

"At Teesside Together, we are committed to ending the social stigma around sexual health.

"Open conversations around contraception, STI testing and treatments for sexual health conditions can be difficult, but they are also necessary.

"You can talk to our team of experts about anything. We promise we've heard it all before."

David Royal, medical director for ELM GP Federation, said: "With four clinics offering appointments and a drop-in service, plus the support of our local GP and pharmacy network, Teesside Together is rooted in the community we are here to serve. It's vital that we are accessible to local people so we can play our part in improving the sexual health of our region."

Matthew Wynne, University Hospitals Tees care group director, added: "Working in partnership with ELM and H&SH, the GPs and pharmacies, plus support of our commissioning bodies is key to the delivery of this local service.

"It's a true partnership, with all members united in the common goal of improving the health of our region."

More information

Website: www.teessidetogether.co.uk

Call: 01642 924 117

Matthew Wynne, care group director.

Local team leads the charge for developments in specialised medical field

A passion for patient care, combined with a commitment to sharing knowledge and learning, has led to national recognition in a specialist field.

Professor Vikram Mitra.

The HPB multidisciplinary team.

Hepato-pancreatobiliary (HPB) medicine involves the management of benign and malignant diseases involving the liver, gallbladder, pancreas and bile duct.

Despite hepatobiliary conditions being very common, access to specialist care in this area is not consistent across the UK.

Gastroenterology consultant and chair of Pancreato-biliary Clinical Section of British Society of Gastroenterology (BSG), Professor Vikram Mitra is leading the charge to improve and standardise HPB patient care and train the next generation of clinicians.

Vikram said: "HPB conditions are very common, often complex and difficult to diagnose and treat. We are fortunate at the University Hospital of North Tees to have a brilliant multi-disciplinary team of highly skilled HPB physicians, specialist nurses, dietitians, radiologists, surgeons, anaesthetists and pathologists who offer an incredibly high standard of HPB clinical care.

"We have access to the most up-to-date endoscopy equipment required to deliver complex HPB endoscopic procedures.

"In 2023, the Joint Advisory Group (JAG) for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy UK visited our hospital and advised that certain aspects of our HPB endoscopy patient care and practices should be shared nationally, which we are always happy to do."

Innovations and best practice within the multidisciplinary team include:

- Approved training courses for colleagues across the country
- Ongoing support and advice to run efficient HPB services
- Held the first patient education day on pancreatitis
- Taking a lead role in research, including 'Priority Setting Partnership in Pancreatitis' which identified the top ten research needs in pancreatitis in the UK
- Hosting a dedicated HPB medicine trainee every year
- Securing an additional NHS England funded post to train a second clinician

Vikram commented: "Across the UK, we expect to lose around 30% of the current ERCP consultant workforce within the next five years due to retirement – so we felt it is important that we continue to train and develop our own colleagues for future resilience of these services."

In 2024, North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust reported:

- 129 HPB cancers diagnosed
- 563 follow up patients (pancreatitis, pancreatic cysts, gallbladder polyps) treated in specialist nurse-led clinics
- 500 plus new patients (benign and malignant disease) treated in consultant-led clinics
- 445 ERCPs and 435 EUS procedures were carried out some of which were carried out under deep sedation

Midwifery-led service offers new mums chance to reflect on pregnancy

A midwifery-led service is offering mums and families the opportunity to discuss their pregnancy and birth experiences, as well as making meaningful improvements in midwifery.

Midwives Nicola Spiller and Jodie Nicholson make up the birth reflections team.

The 'birth reflections' service is open to mums who have given birth under our care.

Run by midwives Jodie Nicholson and Nicola Spiller, mums are invited to attend a private one-hour appointment with one of the midwives to revisit and explore their birth story and ask any questions.

Jodie said: "For many women, recollection of their birth experience can be hazy – due to medication or just sheer tiredness. Birth reflections provides them and their birth partners with the opportunity to explore those moments in a trauma-informed way, to ask questions and give some clarity around the processes and decisions made."

Nicola continued: "We see women years later – and we quite often get referrals from ladies who are in or planning their second pregnancy. They've never really explored their first delivery and realise now that they have questions that are unanswered."

As well as helping women understand their births, it also offers Jodie and Nicola the opportunity to listen to families' feedback and make meaningful change within midwifery practice.

Jodie explains: "One of the biggest things to come from reflections is keeping families together during post-birth surgery, where possible. A couple of years ago, if mum needed to go to theatre for repair of a tear or manual removal of placenta, their baby and birth partner would stay in the delivery suite. This separation disturbed bonding and interrupted skin to skin opportunities.

"After feedback from the birth reflections service, we're pleased to say we've been able to facilitate this. Birthing partners and babies can now go to theatre, provided everyone's clinically stable, so mum and baby can have that skin to skin contact. It's such a small change, but it's made a massive difference to women's experiences."

For more information about the reflections service or to refer yourself online, please scan the QR code.

New initiative launched to keep patients safe at home

We have joined North East Ambulance Service to launch 'call before convey'

The new service is designed to prevent avoidable hospital admissions and reduce the risk of hospital-associated deterioration from care homes. It enables paramedics to access a 24/7 dedicated phone line, directly connecting to a clinical triage nurse who will review individual cases and regularly assess patients both in and out of hours.

It focuses on patients aged 65 and over who reside in care or residential homes and do not require acute or specialist interventions, such as PPCI (primary percutaneous coronary intervention), stroke care, thrombolysis (a treatment to dissolve dangerous blood clots), or emergency trauma care.

This partnership allows ambulance crews and healthcare professionals to refer eligible patients directly to appropriate community services.

Luke Ventress, consultant, said: "Having this new single point of access with ambulance crews and our teams in the community, we can have a clinical discussion together regarding whether hospital admission would be appropriate for these patients.

"As we know, for patients who are frail and from residential care homes, hospital admission isn't always the best thing for them.

"Coming into hospital can increase their risk of infection and delirium, and we may never get them back to where they were before they came into hospital.

"We have developed our community services to offer a range of professional responses across nursing services, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and social care. They work in collaboration to ensure all the individuals' health and social care needs are met when a paramedic hands over an individual."

Luke Ventress, consultant.

Meet the facilities lead inspiring a new generation of NHS staff

Our NTH Solutions colleagues work closely with Catcote Academy's Brierton Sixth Form, providing work placements for students with special educational needs – helping them make the transition into the world of work.

Meet their mentor – facilities team leader Tim Carter.

Tim joined the University Hospital of North Tees 47 years ago as a porter. Since then, he has worked his way up the ladder to lead our facilities teams.

With an in-depth knowledge of facilities, Tim opted to support the 'Catcote crew', as they're affectionately known. He worked closely with Catcote Academy careers lead Jackie McGarry and NTH Solutions assistant director of operations Natalie Wintersgill to design a 12-week rotational work experience programme – giving students access to gain practical experience in various departments.

Tim said: "When some of the young students came initially in September 2024, some of them were dreadfully shy and unsure of themselves. Now, they've blossomed. You can see a real change in their demeanour and the way they hold themselves. It's a joy seeing them so happy and having so much confidence now."

Now-retired facilities team leader Tim Carter.

Tim retired from his role this summer, but leaves behind a lasting legacy as the programme welcomes its third cohort of students.

He continued: "I've always tried to be a role model and a leader for people in the workplace. I recognised from an early age that things aren't always easy or handed to you on a plate, and you have to work hard for good things to come your way.

"I've tried to instil this in the students. It's a real privilege to be in a position to give people a chance in life and I love to make people feel taller and believe in themselves.

"The students have made me feel like a superstar during the final year of my career."

Jackie McGarry, careers lead at Catcote Academy, said: "All of our teachers refer to Tim as our 'Earth angel' because of the impact he has had on our students. We are so sad that he's retired.

"We are all going to miss him and the unwavering support he has offered to our students, making them realise that the world of work is truly accessible for them, and that opportunities are available to them if they have the right attitude and work hard. This will inspire a generation to come, and for that we are so thankful."

NTH Solutions: Did you know?

- Our central sterile services department processes around 1.5 million surgical instruments per year
- Last year our plumbers unblocked nearly 1,400 toilets and drains
- 240 portions of fish and chips are served in our restaurants every Friday

To find out more about our NTH Solutions services, please visit www.nthsolutions.co.uk

A day in the life of... a senior audiologist

Ritu Kumar-Gustard is a senior audiologist based at One Life in Hartlepool, whose work supports audiology patients with hearing assessments and auditory disorders.

After an initial interest in optometry, Ritu, originally from Hartlepool approached her audiology colleagues to ask more about the specialism. One degree later and she has successfully worked her way into a senior audiologist position.

We sat down with her to find out a little bit more about what a career in audiology looks like.

Q: What led you to a career in audiology?

When my sister and I were younger, we had a Saturday job dispensing glasses in an opticians. I approached my audiologist colleagues at my Saturday job and asked if I could observe. It was at that point that I decided I wanted to train further, so I went on to do a degree in audiology at the University of Sunderland.

Q: What might a usual day look like?

My day to day usually features me in clinic. I may see some adult appointments, checking in with my more regular patients who are due a hearing aid device upgrade, to then seeing new patients who have just been referred to the service for diagnostic testing.

We also have ear, nose and throat (ENT) clinics at the University Hospital of Hartlepool, so we will work alongside consultants in the hospital to support with any diagnostic tests that are required.

We also do domiciliary visits about twice a month – so that involves going to see patients (as far as Seaham) who may be housebound but also need audiology support.

I am primarily based at the One Life, but there is definitely a bit of variety in moving around to hospital and home visits that keeps things interesting.

I also run my own private ear wax removal business. I would always advocate that people see someone qualified and registered for this type of procedure to ensure you don't do damage to your ear.

Q: What do you love about your role?

It is the patients at the end of the day. For example, they might come in with a problem with their hearing aid and you get to solve the issue and immediately see how much of a difference you have made. There is massive satisfaction in knowing they will go home and you've made a difference to their day.

I also have to add that I have an amazing close-knit team who are really supportive of one another!

Ritu Kumar-Gustard in the atrium at One Life Hartlepool.

Elizabeth celebrates her 105th birthday at hospital

A loud and proud 'many happy returns' to Stockton woman Elizabeth Kay, who turned 105 on Friday 3 October 2025 on the wards of the University Hospital of North Tees.

Born in 1920, Elizabeth has lived in Stockton her whole life, working in general grocery shops she owned with her late husband Herbert.

Elizabeth is the eldest of six girls and served in the Women's Land Army during World War II helping to ensure a supply of food for the war effort. After suffering a fall in her home, which grandson Anthony shares to care for her, Elizabeth was admitted to the University Hospital of North Tees.

Daughter Jeanette Baggaley and husband Alan came up from their home in Stoke to be with Elizabeth on her special day. The family never planned to be singing 'Happy Birthday' in hospital but the ward staff rallied round to make sure this monumental achievement was properly marked.

Jeanette said: "We've got Mum's card from the King with her on the ward. She is sleeping a lot but when she is awake, she knows it's her special birthday."

The Baggeley family (left to right): Daughter Jeanette, Elizabeth, grandson Anthony and son-in-law Alan.

Emergency doctor's initiative to help patients without basic supplies

An emergency doctor is leading an initiative to provide hospital patients with fresh socks and basic supplies - as part of wider efforts to tackle health inequalities in the local community.

Jess Walker, specialty doctor in the urgent and emergency care department at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Jess Walker, specialty doctor in the urgent and emergency care department at the University Hospital of North Tees, came up with the idea to help patients brought into the service for treatment.

Jess explained: "We have a lot of people coming through the department who are homeless or sofa surfing who come in with nasty ulcers on their feet and legs. Sometimes we have to cut a patient's socks off to assess the ulcers and other times we just give them back and the patient puts them over their infections.

"It felt very undignified for these patients to have to put their filthy or soiled socks back on once we had treated and bandaged them.

"So, working with an ethical clothing company called Leiho, we now provide new socks to any patients who needs them.

"Thanks to our trust volunteering team, we also have other clean socks donated to us.

"Something like this can make a real difference to someone's life, especially those facing health inequalities like so many do in our local community."

George Simpson, consultant in emergency care, added: "As part of the project we have a number of plans in place aimed at helping people.

"Jess had the very compassionate idea of giving these patients a clean pair of sock to go home with - and to start, bought 10 pairs herself. Now working with the hospital volunteers and a charity with local links she has bags of them and is branching out to toiletries and hygiene products.

"I want to acknowledge and thank Jess for the care and compassionate she has shown to our patients."

Hospice celebrates four decades of caring for palliative care patients

A hospice in Teesside has celebrated four decades of caring for palliative care patients and their loves ones across its community.

Butterwick Hospice held an event to mark 40 years since its opening, inviting guest Dame Susan Snowdon, Lord Lieutenant of County Durham along with a host of other visitors.

The event included a tour of the day hospice, the children's hospice and the family support area.

It also included a visit to the adult inpatient unit, a facility jointly run with staff from the University Hospital of North Tees since reopening two years ago.

The event continued with speeches from chair of trustees professor Mike Bramble, professor Sir Amritpal Hungin - who has become a hospice patron - and Dame Susan Snowdon.

Speaking to guests, chief executive Edward Gorringe said: "Butterwick Hospice Care was founded by Mary Butterwick in response to the deeply distressing experience of losing her husband, John, to a brain tumour in 1979. After being told there was nothing more that could be done for him and receiving no emotional or practical support, Mary was determined to create a more compassionate alternative for others facing similar situations.

"I am delighted to say that today, Butterwick Hospice continues to serve communities across Teesside and County Durham, providing a wide range of services to children and adults, and staying true to Mary's original vision of compassionate end-of-life care."

Speaking about the hospice's inpatient unit, Edward added: "I want to thank our colleagues at North Tees and Hartlepool and their support and encouragement in getting our services back to where they should be.

"The staff in our inpatient unit are largely on secondment from the hospital with the two sets of staff working together very closely. Staff move back and forth between here and the hospital and their support has been instrumental so I want to thank them for that.

"We are committed to continuing the legacy here – providing loving care to all our patients and their families and emphasising that dignity, comfort and emotional support is the bedrock of what we do."

The speeches were followed by the unveiling of a plaque to mark the 40 year anniversary.

Members of staff from University Hospitals Tees at the event.

New blood infections testing programme launched at emergency department

Anyone attending the emergency department at the University Hospital of North Tees who has blood taken will now be offered a routine test for diseases in the blood.

Consultant in emergency medicine Dr George Simpson and emergency department matron Laura Pennicott.

The initiative is designed to pick up infections early, many of which can show no symptoms but may cause long-term health problems if left untreated.

The test simply involves taking a small additional blood sample to examine for HIV, Hepatitis C and syphilis.

All results are completely confidential and patients who would prefer not to be tested can request to opt out.

Dr George Simpson, consultant in emergency medicine at University Hospital of North Tees, said: "This is a really positive step for our community.

"Many people may be living with an infection without realising it. This simple test allows us to identify problems early and get patients the right support and treatment.

"It's quick, it's confidential and it could make a huge difference to someone's health."

The tests help improve early diagnosis and treatment, while reducing the spread of infections.

Support

HIV, Hepatitis C and syphilis are often spread through sexual contact. Intravenous drug use is also linked to blood diseases.

Residents in the area can access proactive sexual health advice and support from Teesside Together at: www.teessidetogether.co.uk

Information about support for drug abuse can be found online at: www.nth.nhs.uk/in the-know-adults

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