

15 February 2019

Dear Colleague

I am writing to let you know that yesterday the Stroke Joint Committee of Clinical Commissioning Groups reached unanimous agreement on the future of emergency stroke services in Kent and Medway and has made the decision to implement the preferred option to establish hyper acute stroke units at William Harvey Hospital, Darent Valley Hospital and Maidstone Hospital.

Yesterday's decision comes after a five-year review of urgent stroke services. The committee members considered a wealth of data and evidence which they believe shows that this is the right thing for patients.

At the moment despite the hard work of dedicated NHS staff, stroke services in Kent and Medway are some of the poorest in the country. This is not acceptable and that is why the Stroke Review Team has worked so hard over the last five years to bring about change to improve stroke care. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the review. This has been a detailed and robust process, led by stroke specialists dedicated to improving care for patients.

I realise this outcome may be disappointing for some areas and some organisations, however these new units will make it possible for the NHS in Kent and Medway to offer specialist stroke care round the clock, every day of the year. This will reduce disability and we believe will save an additional life every fortnight as a result.

As you know, there was an extensive public consultation on the proposed changes, involving thousands of people. Those who responded said they understand why stroke services need to change, but many had concerns about the impact of those changes.

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The Stroke Review Team and the Joint Committee of CCGs listened carefully to those concerns and considered them in detail. While the proposals have not changed, we are working to address issues such as travel and transport and putting plans in place to make sure that rehabilitation and support services are closer to home and better planned.

We will now work in partnership with local hospital trusts, on the implementation phase of this programme, and we anticipate the new stroke service will begin in Maidstone and Darent Valley hospitals in about a year, and the service at William Harvey will begin in spring of 2021 due the larger scale building work required at this site. The two-phase approach to implementation has been recommended by local stroke clinicians. The clinicians feel very strongly that this is the best option to improve care for as many people as possible as quickly as possible. This approach will be confirmed in the coming weeks.

We will continue to keep you updated on the work of the Stroke Review, particularly around the timeline for implementation, the development of new rehabilitation services and travel mitigations for patients and carers.

Best wishes

Rachel Jones

Senior Responsible Officer for the Kent and Medway Stroke Review and Director of Acute Strategy and Partnerships, Kent and Medway STP

