WINTER PRESSURES

Report Purpose:
Decision / Approval
Discussion
Information ✓

Brief description of the item and any significant issues:

This briefing provides an update in relation to this year’s winter pressures.
THE NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS

WINTER PRESSURES

This briefing provides an update in relation to this year’s winter pressures.

The Winter Plan put in place in October 2008, is fully operational and this includes 41 additional inpatient beds opened (35 beds at the RVI and 6 beds at Freeman). In addition to increased bed capacity, medical and therapy staffing and support service staffing, such as domestic services cover, have been enhanced.

Levels of emergency activity were elevated during the early part of December, more specifically adult and paediatric medical emergencies were numerous. The Trust also remained busy during the Christmas and New Year week when the numbers of patients presenting with diarrhoea and respiratory related illnesses increased. This has resulted in a number of infection outbreaks across the Trusts and during December 2008, there were 11 patient cases of ‘norovirus’ declared. This compares to 38 cases during December 2007.

Whilst the number of infection outbreaks declared during December 08 was fairly controlled it did result in some bed closures. These bed closures and daily fluctuations in the numbers of emergency admissions, particularly when surges in activity occur, have created some operational difficulties with the management of bed capacity and patients flows. The main Inpatient areas which have been affected include General Medicine, Care of the Elderly and Neurosciences. The numbers of medical boarders has risen but are within manageable limits.

Performance against the 98% A&E 4hr waiting time standard has at times been at risk due to elevated medical admissions and the impact on bed pressures creating a slow-down in the transfer of patients requiring admission, out of A&E. When levels of activity rise a bottleneck in any part of the system creates pressures elsewhere. At the end of quarter 3 however, the Trust has achieved this standard at 98.4% due to the unstinting efforts of clinical and operational staff. The number of patients attending A&E during December 2008 was however 3% less at 5,708 attendances than the same period in 2007. New Year’s Eve/Day was noted to be particularly ‘quiet.’

Into January 2009, the whole system has remained busy to date with the number of emergencies running fairly constant. Diarrhoea and respiratory related illnesses have remained prevalent however over recent days this appears to be decreasing. These symptoms have also affected trust staff particularly Nursing where there have been increased numbers of short-term sickness absence. No beds have been closed as a result.

There has been a natural return to normal levels of elective activity with no patients being cancelled as a result of Winter bed pressures. Critical care capacity has been reported as extremely tight for the last week both in adult and paediatric areas. An update in this respect will be given at the meeting.
The Trust is submitting Daily Situation Reports to the Department of Health and providing daily conference call information to NHS North East.

Melanie Hornett
Nursing and Patient Services Director
8th January 2009