

Request title:

Thoracic Surgery relocation proposal

Date of Response: 9th March 2016

Further to your Freedom of Information request, the Trust has answered your questions in the order they appear in your request.

Request and reply

We would like to follow up on a recent news article (Express and Echo 060116) that related to a possibility that thoracic surgery could transfer from the RD&E Hospital to Derriford Hospital Plymouth, In order for us to do this, we would like to ask you the following questions:

1. Can you please confirm as to what the current position is with regard to a proposal to relocate thoracic surgery from the RD&E to Derriford Hospital?

It is currently planned that the Thoracic surgical service at the RD&E will be relocated to become part of a peninsular-wide service at Derriford Hospital from 1st June 2016. It is planned that outpatient and diagnostic services will continue to be provided in Exeter and Barnstaple, but surgery itself will be undertaken at Derriford hospital.

If there are plans to relocate the service:

2. Can you provide us with information that describes the rationale behind this decision?

The Thoracic surgical service at the Royal Devon & Exeter (RD&E) has good outcomes and strong links with other interconnected services; however, due to the low numbers of patients requiring thoracic surgical intervention, the service is too small to be sustainable in the long term. This means that:

- Only two surgeons cover the service for elective and emergency care, which is extremely onerous for the surgeons involved.
- The provision of services to local patients would be at risk in the event of any unplanned absence of anyone in the team.
- If the RD&E recruited more surgeons to reduce the on-call frequency, there would not be sufficient work to maintain the skill levels of all the surgeons.
- The national direction for specialised services such as this is for them to be centralised into a smaller number of specialist centres. There is good evidence that surgeons who undertake high numbers of procedures have better patient outcomes.

3. Can you provide us with information that explains which specific services may be transferred to Derriford, in relation to a patient's pathway through referral, diagnosis, treatment and aftercare?

At present it is proposed that all non-surgical care which is currently provided in Exeter and Barnstaple will continue to be provided in those locations. This includes outpatient appointments, non-surgical diagnostic procedures such as scans, and non-surgical treatments. A medical thoracoscopy service (examination and biopsy of the chest using an endoscope) will also be provided by the respiratory physicians in Exeter. Thoracic operations will only be undertaken in Derriford. A small number of high risk patients may need to see an anaesthetist in Plymouth prior to their surgery to ensure that they can safely undergo the procedure.

4. Will there still be the same range of treatment options available at the RD&E for patients who have palliative surgical need?

At present it is proposed that all non-surgical care which is currently provided in Exeter and Barnstaple will continue to be provided in those locations. This includes outpatient appointments, non-surgical diagnostic procedures such as scans, and non-surgical treatments. A medical thoracoscopy service (examination and biopsy of the chest using an endoscope) will also be provided by the respiratory physicians in Exeter. Thoracic operations will only be undertaken in Derriford. A small number of high risk patients may need to see an anaesthetist in Plymouth prior to their surgery to ensure that they can safely undergo the procedure.

5. Can you provide details of any plans to engage with patients and the public around the transfer?

A public and patient engagement process is expected to run from early April. The details of this are not yet confirmed but will be communicated with stakeholders in due course.

6. What timescales are being proposed in relation to a transfer and communications around this?

The planned transfer date is 6th June 2016. The timescale for public engagement is as above. Details of the transfer have been shared with the Health Overview and Scrutiny committee of Devon County Council and further discussions will take place over the next few weeks.

7. Have RD&E received patient experience feedback that relates to Upper Gastro-Intestinal Surgery at Derriford and if so, can you provide details as to any issues or concerns raised by people who live outside of the Plymouth area?

The Trust has been unable to identify any formal patient experience feedback relating to the Upper GI surgery at Derriford on its current complaint management system although the service transfer was over 5 years ago.