

Patient Update

Newsletter for Patient Participation Groups

June 2020



Steve McManus, Chief Executive, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust thanks community for support through Covid-19



The hundreds of local people, community groups and businesses who have supported the Trust during the pandemic have been publicly thanked by in a letter from Steve on behalf of the 5,500 employees he leads.

Since the pandemic started earlier this year the Trust has been overwhelmed with support from the Berkshire-wide community.

This has ranged from:

- financial support to fund a long-term wellbeing centre for staff
- daily donations of hot meals, snacks, face masks and toiletries
- gifts of iPads to enable patients to connect with family unable to visit them in hospital
- volunteers delivering medicines and equipment between the Trust's sites as well as acting as 'pharmacy runners' at the hospital and cleaning wheelchairs and other equipment
- people volunteering to run a pop up supermarket and staff wellbeing area
- volunteers stitching and sewing and creating PPE, scrubs and laundry bags

"To see such outpourings of kindness and generosity has really taken us all aback," said Steve (pictured centre).

“Everyone has been affected in one way or another by this awful pandemic, either becoming ill themselves, caring for poorly loved ones, or furloughed and worried about work and their finances, and for them to want to do something to help us has been both humbling and uplifting”.

Funding available for volunteer groups

If you have links with voluntary organisations operating in Reading, you may want to apply for a share of the £70k set aside by the local council for groups who are working to support their communities during the pandemic. There are full details here:

<http://news.reading.gov.uk/volunteers-week2020>

Closing date for submissions of interest is 30 June.

Mental Health Action Plan unveiled

A 14 point plan of action to improve mental health crisis pathways in Berkshire West, making them more readily available and easier to access, has been drawn up following a lengthy consultation with service users and other key stakeholders.

National figures show one in four adults and one in 10 children experience mental health difficulties and many more people are caring for people who experience mental ill health. The Covid pandemic is also already showing increases in the number of people reporting mental health concerns and it is expected that these numbers will increase.



The action plan has been put together by the Berkshire West Mental Health and Learning Disability Programme Board and follows a comprehensive eight month engagement and consultation campaign.

An NHS 111 Crisis Line has already been set up offering a single point of access for all Mental Health calls and will be co-ordinated by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust in liaison with the NHS111 service.

Specialist practitioners will triage calls to the 111 line – supported by nurses with expert knowledge and skills, and ambulance staff will also be trained in initial mental health crisis response techniques.

The 111 system will also link into a new Crisis Line to operate 24/7 for people of all ages. This will provide digital access via Skype, email or LiveChat to make it more accessible to people living in remote areas.

Another key proposal is development of specialist access for children and young people offering them crisis assessment in the community. This includes intensive locally-based support and intervention aimed at preventing admission to hospital.

There are also plans for more joined up work between agencies caring for people with delirium and dementia, helping people manage better in their own homes and prevent admissions to hospital.

By the autumn it's anticipated a new crisis café called a 'Breathing Space' will be piloted in Reading with the longer term plan to establish similar facilities in Wokingham and West Berkshire.

And additional work is planned in primary care to enable GP surgeries to offer more timely support within the community, assisted by a range of health and social care professionals including pharmacists, social prescribers and Physician Associates.

Katrina Anderson, (pictured) Director of Joint Commissioning at Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group, said: "We are determined to provide local people with a mental health service that is easy to access, can step in and support them very quickly and then stay by their side as they work through their issues.

"At the heart of all this work has been the voices of service users and the people who live with them and care for them. They've told us what currently works and what doesn't, and what improvements are needed to help them to live more independent, safe and happier lives," she said.

Sam Burrows takes over day to day running of CCG

Sam Burrows, Deputy Chief Officer of Berkshire West CCG has returned to take responsibility for the day to day running of the service following the departure of Cathy Winfield to a new role in primary care with the NHS nationally. Sarah Seaholme will continue in her role as Director of Strategy.

"I'd like to thank Cathy for all of the leadership and drive she has brought to the CCG over the last eight years. I'm pleased to be back in Berkshire West following my time as the Deputy Lead for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS)," said Sam.



Thinking about going to A&E but unsure? – Ask A&E

There's now a new online symptom checker for people concerned about a health issue and unsure where to go for help.

Once you've registered with Ask A&E it will ask a few questions about your concerns and the symptom checker will then signpost you to the most appropriate service for your healthcare needs.



It will also support patients affected by Covid-19 and those hesitant to attend the hospital, but who could benefit from other care services. All data is anonymised and encrypted in accordance with the Data Protection Act: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/ask.htm

At the beginning of the month the Royal Berkshire Hospital's Emergency Department (A&E) reverted back to its usual way of working after making changes during the pandemic. Arrangements are in place to keep people safe including a tented outside waiting area to help maintain social distancing.

People are being reassured that the ED is a safe option for those who are seriously unwell and they are encouraged not to delay attending if they are suffering symptoms which may indicate a life threatening condition such as strokes, heart attacks or are experiencing serious breathing difficulties.

The Minor Injuries Unit and the plaster clinic are also now back on site at the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

Masks in hospital

Please remember if you do have to visit the hospital you now need to wear a mask or face covering at all times.



GPs doors are still open

Berkshire West GPs have stepped up their communication to remind patients that surgeries are still open - but operating in different ways to keep people safe.

Some doctors are concerned that messages around coronavirus have caused confusion and led to people assuming GP surgeries are closed.

However, whilst practices are limiting footfall into their buildings, GPs and other health care professionals are still at work and available to their patients.

People are being urged to either ring or contact the surgery via email where they will be triaged by an experienced member of the practice team.

GPs are particularly anxious to hear from people who are very unwell or have noticed symptoms like lumps, changes in moles, blood in their urine and stools or unintentional weight loss. And anyone with symptoms that might indicate a suspected heart problem or stroke should also not delay seeking medical support.

Dr Abid Irfan, Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Clinical Lead, said: "We're still reminding people with suspected Covid symptoms to stay away from surgeries, seek support from NHS 111 online and self-isolate. This is to prevent the spread of the virus.



"However, what's worrying us is that some people think GP surgeries have shut down altogether during the outbreak and this is definitely not the case. If people are very unwell then they must ring or email the surgery."

People with appointments for maternity, child vaccinations and mental health support are also being asked to ring rather than visit their surgery. These appointments will still be carried out, but in ways that protect patients and surgery staff.

There's plenty of advice on the NHS website www.nhs.uk and www.berkshirewestccg.nhs.uk

Help for new parents struggling alone

A new campaign has been launched to support parents who are finding the demands of babies and young children more challenging during the covid pandemic.

Lockdown and social distancing rules mean many agencies which care for families in need are not operating as normal and, at the same time, support from wider family members, friends and community is also limited.

The concern is this leaves mums and dads trying to manage alone and could lead to issues such as mental health, isolation and in extreme cases, harm to babies and children.

Health and social care teams have joined forces with other key agencies in Berkshire West to send a clear message to parents that it's OK to access vital help or support, to deal with the stress and anxiety of a crying baby or difficult toddler, including help from their network of family, friends and neighbours, where it is safe to do so.

A range of key messages are now being publicised on targeted social media platforms to reassure parents that they are not alone in their struggles and to reassure others that they can still go to the aid of a family if they are concerned.

Liz Stead, Head of Safeguarding Children for Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) said: "Often there's a network of support from family, friends and neighbours – people who can come in and give the parents a bit of rest and respite. And there are usually a lot of playgroups and other baby-focused community sessions going on where parents can get together and support each other. But of course, lockdown and social distancing has put a stop to all that," she said.

"However, the guidelines on social distancing are quite clear on this – if someone is at risk of abuse, violence or neglect they must seek help. And if someone is worried they are still allowed to get involved," she added.

