

REPORT TO CUMBRIA HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Rowanwood Ward – Temporary Closure Update

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rowanwood Ward is a Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) based at the Carleton Clinic in North Cumbria. It has 10 commissioned beds for adult men and women providing assessment and treatment by a multi-disciplinary team.

Rowanwood Ward has had long-standing difficulties with recruitment and retention and is currently reliant on agency registered staff to operate. However, the balance between quality and risk has recently changed with the ability to run a safe service due to the reliance on temporary staff to cover the core shifts. As a result of securing new posts elsewhere in the Trust, there have been further registered nurse resignations. With notice periods being worked through it is expected that the staffing issue will deteriorate further reaching its peak in August.

A decision to reduce bed availability to 6 beds was made in July 2021 to mitigate the risks and alleviate some of the pressure faced by the ward teams. Following this decision, a number of options were reviewed in relation to sustaining the 6 beds. However, the reliability of these other options were not deemed sufficient, potentially resulting in only 3 employed registered nurses working on the ward by early September 2021.

It was therefore escalated for decision by the Trust Board to reach agreement to temporarily close Rowanwood and absorb the subsequent bed impact across the Trust due to the inability to assure safe staffing levels. Given the scale of challenge with registered nurse vacancies on Rowanwood Ward and across North Cumbria inpatient wards more generally, it is proposed that the timescale for the ward reopening will depend upon the progress in recruiting into the qualified nursing vacancies, which is likely to take several months.

This report provides scrutiny members within an update on the current position.

2. BACKGROUND

North Cumbria Inpatient services have witnessed a chronic deterioration in registered nurse numbers resulting in unprecedented high vacancies across all our inpatient wards. This is particularly acute in Rowanwood ward. This situation predates the transfer of services from Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in 2019 with services traditionally relying on the use of agency staff due to the inability to recruit.

This issue has continued despite multiple attempts to recruit staff since CNTW took over the North Cumbria services. The situation is further heightened due to the following areas

impacting on both the supply of CNTW employed registered and agency registered nurses, as well as our ongoing ability to retain staff working in our inpatient areas:

- Covid -19 and its cumulative impact on staff morale and fatigue levels.
- Higher clinical acuity contributing to higher stress levels particularly in newly registered staff.
- The translation of the above points into a higher inpatient sickness position (currently 10.95% across inpatients).
- Re-emergence of Covid related absence in recent weeks as staff need to isolate.
- Over time, the loss of experienced staff reducing the skill base and available support for less experienced staff.
- Community initiatives and new posts being more attractive to inpatient staff who, for the above reasons, opt to apply for these opportunities perceived as both more attractive less stressful for the same level of pay.
- Greater opportunities for advancement to band 6 level in the community with comparably less post qualification experience than required in inpatient areas results in a drain of band 5 nurses.
- Reduced supply of newly qualified nurses resulting from less numbers graduating from the University of Cumbria.
- A reducing supply of registered agency resource which is subject to market pressures, seasonal variation and also reputational issues (“how hard do I need to work in this area compared to other areas?”).
- Ongoing market conditions affecting the ability to recruit to Cumbria.

2.1 Mitigation

A number of steps have been undertaken over a period of time to mitigate the risks across inpatient areas in North Cumbria, in particular on Rowanwood Ward. These include:

- Introduction of a daily staffing huddle with senior clinical staff, Associate Director (AD), Clinical Manager (CM) to ensure all wards are covered and regular staff are moved daily to support ward fragility.
- Short term agreements in place with movement of Registered staff around the Carleton clinic site to support.
- Increased Healthcare Assistant recruitment over the base line budget to support staffing numbers.
- Rebase of qualified staff to level load agency use in Rowanwood.
- Team Development focus on the current Rowanwood team facilitated by *CNTW's Associate Director Organisational Improvement* (limited given the number of agency staff engaged).
- International Nurse recruitment cohort x10 which will support the older adult and learning disability clinical areas, however due to vacancies across those areas, there is no movement to rebase staff across to Rowanwood.
- Local and national recruitment events to showcase and attract staff with zero impact.
- Increased allied health professional recruitment over and above base line budgets to support the MDT.
- Consistent agency qualified staff based on Rowanwood to prop up and support the qualified staff (however insufficient to replace numbers of regular registered staff lost on a reliable basis).
- Continuous, rolling band 5 adverts out on NHS jobs alongside ward adverts specific to encourage all applications.
- Flexible working arrangements in place to ensure we retain staff.

- Appointment of specialist nurse and OT Clinical Lead to enhance the senior clinical staff cohort.
- Decrease in bed numbers to 6 to support the staff group and rebalance staff to patient ratio.
- Closed to admissions from July 2021.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF TEMPORARY CLOSURE

3.1 Transfer of existing patients

At the time of decision being made to temporarily close Rowanwood there were six patients on the unit. All were detained under the Mental Health Act. Of the six patients, only four were residents in North Cumbria, with one of these patients requiring a PICU level of care. Subsequently, all patients from Rowanwood were appropriately placed into pathways suitable to their needs. These pathways included acute adult inpatient, forensic services and rehabilitation locally and in the North East.

3.2 Quality impact assessment on Cumbria Patients requiring Psychiatric Intensive Care

In addition to implementing the temporary closure, ensuring that proactive assessment was undertaken on the quality impact of this decision has also been a key area of focus. This included the dialogue with family members and carers in managing the transitions but also understanding any knock on effects, particularly in patients being cared for out of pathway or with a greater distance from their home and support mechanisms.

Consequently, several parameters have been set up and are being monitored within the Locality and at Trust level to assess any quality impact on North Cumbria patients requiring PICU admission. These include:

- Number of patients, their length of stay and any subsequent delays in discharges
- Any bed availability, transport, or staffing issues that may contribute to admission delays
- Any use of out of area PICU
- Incidents on acute wards due to lack of access to PICU or seclusion
- Increased staffing/observations on acute wards (linked to above).

Additionally, the impact on patients and families will be monitored also from a variety of sources including:

- Friends and family feedback
- Complaints
- PALS enquiries
- CQC enquiries
- MP enquiries
- Healthwatch
- Advocate enquiries
- Engagement with patients and families through the Trusts 'getting to know you' process,
- Day to day interactions as part of the wider therapeutic relationship

Since the temporary closure of Rowanwood, at time of writing, there has been no new patient requirement to be transferred to a PICU as either a direct admission from the community or as

a step up from our two acute inpatient wards. Furthermore, there have been no 'out of area' placements.

3.3 Staff transfer

Due to the urgency of the issue, a full staff consultation was not undertaken. This would have taken thirty days and this would have taken us in to the peak of the staffing crisis without solution. However, an open process was utilised with staff that followed the broad principles of consultation with 43 staff across all disciplines being given the opportunity to have one to one meetings with management over a two-week period with expressions of interest for potential transfer destinations.

All staff have been retained within the North Cumbria locality. The majority of staff (forty members) were placed into other wards teams on the Carleton Clinic site and our Yewdale ward on the West Cumberland Hospital site. Community services received three members of staff.

4. CONCLUSION

CNTW is committed to maintaining inpatient mental health facilities in North Cumbria and have recently completed remedial works to alleviate dormitory accommodation in Oakwood Ward on the Carleton Clinic site.

Work is about to commence on a £1.8m refurbishment of the Hadrian Unit again on the Carleton Clinic site. This will also see the creation of seclusion and de-escalation facilities as well as the provision of ensuite facilities throughout the ward.

CNTW, also recently expressed an interest for a new hospital build to replace current inpatient facilities in Carlisle as part of the UK Governments new hospitals plan for England. However, this expression of interest was unsuccessful against some of the other capital priorities across the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System footprint.

In line with the national priority to recruit and retain NHS staff, CNTW has also established a Recruitment and Retention task force which is overseeing and guiding our recruitment and retentions strategies for the entire footprint of services across CNTW. There is a particular focus in the work of the Task Force in looking at inpatient staffing as it is recognised that this environment is particularly hard to recruit and retain staff.

Locally discussions have already started to take place about establishing a new team for Rowanwood Ward going forward. A major focus of this group is recruitment of sufficiently skilled and experience registered nurses. This will be supported by the development of a detailed induction and staff training strategy for Rowanwood going forward.

As outlined previously the Trust will be working with partners over the forthcoming months to progress the arrangements for re-opening, which will be solely dependent on the ability to recruit and achieve safe staffing levels as the principal criteria.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cumbria Health Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of this update report.

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