

## **Responding to the national increase in demand for acute mental health services**

**For the last four years the demand for acute mental health care had been reducing, after investment in community-based care and a focus on prevention and early intervention. However, the past year has seen a reverse in this trend, with a marked increase in the demand for services, including hospital beds. This has been the experience of mental health providers across the country, where on some occasions there is not a single psychiatric intensive care bed available in England.**

The causes of this increased demand are likely related to the economic downturn, with a more challenging employment environment and reforms to the welfare system affecting people's mental health. Our colleagues in local authorities have experienced significant financial challenges which have impacted the level of social support and housing available. This makes discharge from psychiatric hospital problematic for some service users who do not have appropriate accommodation identified, and has affected the overall availability of beds.

Clearly, long-term solutions are required at a national level, and there have been various commitments to increasing mental health resources made by central government as part of the Parity of Esteem agenda. Despite this, spending on mental health remains relatively low. In the short to medium term we are taking action locally to ensure maximum availability of acute mental health care and to provide this care in, or close to, Hampshire wherever possible.

### **What we are doing:**

- Twice-weekly local and regional bed usage meetings scrutinising every admission and progress towards discharge
- Processes for both admission and discharge have been changed to expedite treatment interventions and to provide a level of challenge to clinicians, promoting clearer purposes for admissions with timescales.
- Opening all contingency beds increasing capacity from 107 to 115 across Southampton and Hampshire.
- Purchase of six psychiatric intensive care (PICU) beds from the private sector. This is more cost effective than 'ad-hoc' purchases, and provides guaranteed, more consistent care for patients.
- Converting a PICU ward at Elmleigh Hospital in Havant to make more acute beds available, from 21 November 2014.

- Providing an additional two PICU beds at Parklands Hospital in Basingstoke from 1 December 2014.
- Formalised an arrangement with Solent NHS Trust to purchase two acute beds at the Orchards unit.
- Developing a scheme with a private provider to jointly deliver a “step-down” facility at the former Eastrop Unit for the next two years.

In addition to these actions, we are committed to working with our commissioners and primary care colleagues to create long term, sustainable solutions. We strongly believe that more investment in mental health is required locally and nationally, so people get the care they deserve at the right time and in the right place – as close to home as possible.

It is important to be clear that, despite our current challenges, we will always provide appropriate acute mental health care whenever a person requires it.

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**Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust**

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