

EALING SAVE OUR NHS

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ACUTE MENTAL HEALTH WARD CLOSURES

A RESPONSE TO WEST LONDON NHS TRUST'S PLANS

Ealing Save Our NHS is totally opposed to the proposed permanent closure of Hope and Horizon Wards in Ealing, which will mean the loss of 31 acute mental health beds for adults in our community.

Even before this proposal came forward ESON had been campaigning in local shopping centres over the lack of mental health beds and we found that this issue resonated more than any other. Local people not only queued to sign our petition, which will be presented shortly, but many told us their own stories and experiences.

This proposed cut would leave the whole Borough with **NO acute adult mental health beds for anyone under 65** and leave many Ealing patients in a worse position than comparable Boroughs.

Although 17 more beds have been re-designated as acute beds at Lakeside in Hounslow (Robin Ward) using the money saved from closing the 31 beds in Ealing, that's still an unacceptable cut of 14 much needed acute beds and a serious reduction in capacity not just for Ealing, but for the associated Boroughs of Hounslow and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Hope and Horizon Wards were temporarily closed, as was the 136 suite – also known as a Health Based Place of Safety, during the Covid Pandemic. If someone in crisis is picked up by the police as a safety risk, they should be brought to a 136 suite locally – otherwise the police will have to take the patient out of the Borough, which is not only time consuming but means they may be dealt with by a different team than the one they may know in Ealing.

Treating people in acute mental health crisis in the community is simply not always possible; given the potential risk to themselves and others, which is why we need these beds.

Certainly there are significant problems with Hope and Horizon Wards but our belief is that the Trust has a responsibility to provide acute services in Ealing for adults (aged under 65) and it should be planning accordingly, not just closing beds. The problems with Wolsey Wing might not have arisen if the modern John Connolly Wing on the same site had not been closed and demolished leaving a dependency on the much older Wolsey Wing.

It is hard not to draw the conclusion from the images presented that the Wolsey Wing has been deliberately neglected and allowed to run down, because in effect the decision was made long ago to close it.

Although it's being claimed that the Hope and Horizon wards are unsuitable, as far as we know nothing has changed since before the temporary closure. We are also cognisant that the specialist forensic mental health unit in the Tony Hillis Wing, which is in exactly the same Victorian building as Hope and Horizon is to continue and is presumably regarded as safe. The Tony Hillis Wing is used for forensic mental health patients and issues such as ligature points have been largely addressed, so the same could be done within the Hope and Horizon Wards, with investment, until better accommodation is found for all.

In the absence of official figures Ealing Save Our NHS has estimated that if Ealing Borough has the average amount of adults with mental health problems, it's likely to be something like 72,000 – a huge part of the population and an important issue for us all. Although the numbers admitted annually to acute wards is in the hundreds, we must be aware of the importance of defending and improving the services that we have, especially after the years of NHS austerity cuts.

Since 2010, 70 mental health beds have been closed in Ealing, including Hope & Horizon – so to cut another 14 across the Trust should be totally unacceptable, especially as it would leave our Borough bereft of acute adult beds.

THE 'ENGAGEMENT'

Despite the large quantity of slide and statistics, it appears the Trust have chosen not to categorise the overall loss of beds and lack of adult acute beds for under 65's for Ealing as 'significant'. So instead of an actual consultation they are merely obliged to offer 'engagement'.

Meanwhile, we understand that the Trust is already advertising for additional staff to run their Ealing Crisis Team from the Hammersmith and Hounslow sites - which clearly suggests its engagement with the public and local authorities is purely cosmetic.

The poorly advertised three online public events were only attended by a total of 7 members of the public (the majority being from Ealing Save Our NHS). At these events the presenters were eager to steer the attendees into discussion about bus fares for families travelling out of Ealing, rather than the actual decision to close wards. The issue seemed to be more opaque by the frequent references to other non-acute services in Ealing, which are of course not a substitute.

A lot of reference is made to other mental health beds in Ealing, which are not acute beds for under 65s. The 55 beds referred to in the documents are in fact a mix of acute beds for older people and those with dementia (Jubilee and Limes) and short stay step down beds (Amadeus). None of which are suitable for under 65s in acute crisis. These beds and community support are all important, but frankly, they only serve to cloud this issue.

Furthermore at the engagement events, ward closures were presented as inevitable, with no alternative plans to be considered. A video focussing on the worse corners of the Wolsey wing was shown, but no comparable scrutiny of Lakeside and Hammersmith sites, even though of course we inevitably hear concerns about those Wards also.

It would be helpful to be told what use the Wolsey Wing is to be put to. Following the 'temporary' ward closures because of Covid, it was used as an emergency acute mental health A&E. Unless it's intended to be left empty - what does the Trust intend to use this listed wing for?

FINANCIAL ISSUES

It's hard to avoid the conclusion that the closure of these wards is finance driven. Why else was the modern purpose build John Connolly Wing closed leaving a dependency on the Victorian Wolsey Wing?

Whilst the Trust states it has reinvested the monies 'saved' from closing Hope and Horizon beds, they are in fact saving money by an overall cut of 14 beds for the residents of Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow. This is at a time when the need for mental health services continues to grow and lack of acute beds is one of the most critical areas of the NHS according to both the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the BMA.

We also understand from the Trust that they have no direct funding for the 136 suites, despite being responsible for them. They are now funding these Health Based Places of Safety in Hounslow and Hammersmith using the savings from the closure of Hope and Horizon Wards – although they do not propose to have a 136 suite in Ealing Borough!

The re-investment of the funding released by the closure of the Ealing wards and loss of beds into a range of acute crisis and community has been used to provide services across the three Boroughs, so not only have we lost our beds but much of the funding too.

SHORTAGE OF ACUTE BEDS

We have not seen any evidence to substantiate the claim that there are sufficient acute beds. We understand the opposite to be the case, that there is a huge need for beds and that if someone needs to be urgently admitted, it's not unusual for another patient to have to be discharged earlier than they would otherwise be the case.

It's not only Hope and Horizon Wards that are facing closure in North West London – Gordon Hospital in Westminster is facing controversial closure following another "temporary" closure for Covid. That would be a loss of another 60 mental health beds for North West London.

Very worryingly a further Freedom of Information request has revealed that in the Trust area of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith children aged 16 or 17 were admitted to acute adult MH wards no less than 37 times from 2016 to 2021. This is unacceptable and should never happen. The fact that it does, shows the lack of resources for younger patients.

All indications are that mental ill health is rising among this group and that they are likely to contribute significantly to demand in future years. (See Appendix)

In Ealing alone, the population size has increased by 8.5%, from around 338,400 in 2011 to 367,100 in 2021. This is higher than the overall increase for England. The growth continues and will be further accelerated by huge building programmes in the area.

Closing acute wards is wrong in the first place and given that demand is likely to rise it's short termism, more so as there are no plans to replace the wards other than the usual reference to 'care in the community'.

IMPACT OF CLOSURE OF ACUTE BEDS IN EALING

Statistics

In 2021, a Freedom of Information request tells us that 140 Ealing residents were admitted to acute mental health wards in Hammersmith and 212 to Hounslow, a total of 352.

Based on pre-Covid figures provided by the Trust for 2019/20 this figure will rise by at least 200 as during this period a total of 552 Ealing residents were admitted to acute awards in the 3 Boroughs, making them the largest users of acute services. The numbers for Hammersmith (127) and Hounslow (215) were pretty consistent with 2021 but with the additional 210 residents using Hope & Horizon Wards in Ealing.

We don't have any figures to show the rate of occupancy, but clearly there were not enough beds to accommodate the 552 residents, all of which must now be placed out of Borough. We reject the peculiar argument from the Trust that because in the past Ealing acute patients were placed out of the Borough, this somehow makes it acceptable for even more to be sent out.

The Trust claims that it has enough beds due to modern psychiatric treatment don't really match up to the demand that is no longer being met or take any cognisance of the growing Mental Health crisis.

As always, facing financial pressure, the NHS and the Trusts are eager to highlight the merits of 'Care in the Community', but it's simply not right for many patients and pressure on beds is increasing.

Impact on families and patient recovery

In 2021 around 352 families had to travel outside the Borough to visit their loved ones and offer support and this number will increase to around 552 families according to the Trust figures.

Bus fares are a serious issue for some patients and families, but certainly not the main concern. In any case the Trust is only suggesting remuneration for 2 visits per week, which presumably would have to be paid upfront and often not affordable. Daily visits are widely regarded as helpful to recovery but the additional time to make door-to-door journeys to Hammersmith or Hounslow on top of visiting time would be extremely difficult for visitors to manage.

And it's not just family or friends' visits which are the problem with closing the Ealing wards but the potential overall loss of continuity of care. We understand that for the West London Trust, the three Boroughs are to some extent a single unit, but that's not the case for local authority support.

Before discharge from the acute units, patients will usually undergo a period of short term leave (for those sectioned under the Mental Health Act) to reconnect with their local mental health support services, their families, community and places of worship services. Clearly this is much more disjointed than for patients from Hounslow and H & F, who are largely being placed within their own Boroughs with the connection to their local Crisis teams and Local Authority Social Work teams.

BAME Communities

We also believe the proposed closures on the Southall site would adversely affect BAME communities more than others. According to the Trust's report on 2017 – 2018, around 52% of their patients came from an ethnic minority background and this figure would be even higher for Southall and possibly the North of the Borough. This means an already disadvantaged community would be even more adversely affected. It always seems to be the poorest areas which suffer the brunt of cuts.

CONCLUSION

The lack of investment and maintenance in Hope and Horizon goes back for some time – but other services continue to operate in the same old building – presumably safely.

It would be a huge retrograde step to lose 31 much-needed beds for our communities and 14 beds as a whole for Ealing Hammersmith & Hounslow. Mental Health provision is clearly in crisis – alongside other essential NHS services. The Trust has provided no convincing evidence that these beds are not needed – all the indications are the reverse. Nor are there concrete proposals for replacement acute services in the community – even supposing that was possible for seriously ill patients.

Pressure on services continues to mount up, the local population continues to rise and experts in the field believe that the rise in serious mental ill health among young people will impact on adult services in the future.

Therefore we believe that Hope and Horizon Wards should be upgraded and kept in use till such time as these beds can be replaced in Ealing.

Eve Turner

On behalf of Ealing Save Our NHS Mental Health Group

8th December 2022

Appendix: Children and Young People: Mental Health

A number of reports have identified the increase in demand by children and young people for, and referral rates to, mental health services. The pandemic has worsened this situation, not created it. Ealing has a population of approximately 342,000 residents and approximately 86,000 are children and young people under the age of 24. Mental health issues are associated with deprivation and Ealing ranks 88 out of 326 authorities in England.

Most mental health issues begin during the adolescent stage of development and young people are not getting the support they need either because there is a lack of funding to CAMHS or it is difficult to access. The NHS Confederation highlights the lack of funding for mental health across the board and the effect on waiting list numbers and the risk of milder mental health problems becoming more serious. This is an argument for more services for children and young people but it also highlights the need for easily accessible services for adults within the borough, including acute beds, as those increasing numbers of young people with mental health problems move into the adult mental health system.