

Public asked to help shape the future of acute hospital-based stroke services in Somerset

Monday 30 January 2023

Today the NHS in Somerset, is launching a public consultation on the future of acute hospital-based stroke services in Somerset. The consultation which runs from Monday 30 January 2023 for 12 weeks until midnight on Monday 24 April 2023 is seeking the views of people in Somerset on the future of hyper acute and acute stroke (the specialist hospital care people receive in the first few days and weeks after having a stroke) services in the county.

Dr Bernie Marden, Chief Medical Officer, NHS Somerset, said: “We want every stroke patient in Somerset to have the best and most appropriate care possible. After a stroke, if the right specialist treatment, care, and support is received people can go on to live full and independent lives.

“We know that our acute hospital-based stroke services are not currently set up in the best way and that there are differences in the way these services are delivered.

“It is important that we provide high-quality stroke services in Somerset, which are sustainable and fit for the future, which is why we are proposing to change the way acute hospital stroke services are organised in our area, so that everyone in county will have the best opportunity to survive and thrive after stroke.

“Staff, people with lived experience, including carers, and community and voluntary sector support organisations have been working together to develop the best solutions for future acute hospital-based stroke services in Somerset.

“This public consultation is an opportunity to make your voice heard and tell us what you think of the proposals before we make a final decision on the best way forward. I encourage everyone to respond, all views are important to us.”

In Somerset, both Yeovil District Hospital and Musgrove Park Hospital have hyper acute stroke units, and acute stroke units. While the care delivered across local trusts currently is high-quality neither hospital has the right number of specialist staff needed to provide the units with 24/7 consultant cover.

While this is not just a local issue, nationally there is a shortage of stroke medical specialists, it is important to act now as the risk of doing nothing could cause a deterioration in the quality of stroke care in Somerset.

An in-depth evaluation conducted by clinicians, staff, people with lived experience and community and voluntary sector organisations has identified that hyper acute stroke services could be better delivered from one hospital site in Somerset, instead of two.

The public are now being asked to share their views on proposals.

The consultation will seek to understand whether hyper acute and acute stroke services should be provided at:

- one hyper acute stroke unit in Somerset and, if that is the right way forward, whether the unit be located at Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton, and;
- acute stroke services at either:

- Two acute stroke units, one at Musgrove Park Hospital and one at Yeovil District Hospital; or
- One acute stroke unit, which would need to be located at the same hospital as the hyper acute stroke unit proposed to be Musgrove Park Hospital.

Dr Rob Whiting, Consultant Stroke Physician and Clinical Director for Neuroscience and Stroke, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, said: “Stroke is a medical emergency and the third most common cause of death for people under the age of 75 in the UK. There is clear evidence that patients benefit most from being treated at a hyper acute stroke unit in the first 72 hours after their stroke.

“With stroke, what matters is the total time taken from calling 999 to having a scan and starting the right treatment. Travelling an extra 20-30 minutes by ambulance to a specialist stroke unit might worry people but it does mean we can start scanning and treatment as soon as the patient arrives.

“Being in a specialist unit also means that in the three days after having a stroke patients can be seen by stroke specialists every day, which we know is a vital part of recovery. This is not something we can always offer at the current time.

“We are convinced that the proposals for hyper acute stroke units in Somerset will improve the quality of services and help us achieve better outcomes for the 3,000 stroke patients treated in our area each year.

“This is the opportunity to have your say and help us to transform stroke care for everyone in our area and ensure a high-quality and sustainable service for the future.”

Peter Lewis, Chief Executive of Somerset NHS Foundation Trust and Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, said: “I am proud of the care that our colleagues provide for stroke patients, and they are working hard to give the best care possible, but experience from elsewhere has shown that consolidating stroke care can provide more sustainable services and better outcomes for more patients.

“No decision has been made yet and we want people to share their views and to help us understand as many different views on our proposals as possible, including potential benefits or impacts, other ideas or adjustments that could be considered before a decision is made.

“This feedback will help us to shape the model of care and provide support to our committed healthcare professionals delivering this vitally important service.”

To take part you can read the consultation document, participate in public meetings and events, and complete an online or paper questionnaire.

To find out more about our proposals and how to respond to the consultation, please visit www.somersetics.org.uk/stroke

Ends

Background information

A meeting on 26 January 2023 of the NHS Somerset Board gave the go-ahead to the public consultation which is launching today, Monday 30 January 2023. It will run for twelve weeks, until midnight Monday 24 April 2023.

Further information can be found in our consultation document – www.somersetics.org.uk/stroke

Who are we?

NHS organisations in Somerset are working together to improve acute hospital based stroke services in Somerset. This public consultation is led by NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board (NHS Somerset). NHS Somerset is the statutory NHS organisation responsible for implementing Somerset’s health and care strategy. Working collaboratively with primary care partners, foundation trusts, local councils, the voluntary sector and other partner organisations, we oversee the planning, performance, financial management and transformation of the local NHS. All partners working together form the Somerset Integrated Care System (ICS).

This consultation is part of our Fit for my Future strategy. Fit for my Future is a strategy for how we will support the health and wellbeing of the people of Somerset by changing the way we commission and deliver health and care services. It is jointly led by NHS Somerset and Somerset County Council, and includes the main NHS provider organisations in the county.

What are we consulting on?

We are consulting on the future configuration of acute hospital based stroke services, which includes hyper acute stroke and acute stroke services. This is the specialist hospital care people receive in the first few days and weeks after a stroke.

Acute hospital based stroke treatment in Somerset currently takes place at:

- Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton
- Yeovil District Hospital, Yeovil.

Some people who live in Somerset may receive stroke care at other hospitals in neighbouring counties. Only the two hospitals in Somerset are part of these proposals.

This consultation does not include the support and rehabilitation that is provided when patients are discharged from hospital following a stroke. Patients would continue to receive community rehabilitation stroke care, provided in the local community as they would do now. No changes are being proposed to the stroke rehabilitation services provided at South Petherton Community Hospital or Williton Community Hospital. The early supportive discharge at home scheme where rehabilitation is provided in your home would continue to be offered.

An evaluation process by clinicians, staff, people with lived experience and community and voluntary sector organisations, identified that hyper acute stroke services would be better delivered from one hospital site in Somerset, instead of two. They also concluded that if hyper acute services were to be consolidated and in future delivered from a hyper acute stroke unit at only one hospital site in Somerset, Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton was the only solution that could feasibly deliver a high quality, safe, and clinically sustainable hyper acute service.

On this basis, the evaluation identified two potential options for future acute stroke services in Somerset.

We are therefore asking for your views on the following proposals:

- To provide hyper acute stroke services at one hyper acute stroke unit in Somerset and, if that is the right way forward, whether the unit be located at Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton
- To provide acute stroke services at either:
 - Two acute stroke units one at Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton and one at Yeovil District Hospital; or
 - One acute stroke unit, which would need to be located at the same hospital as the hyper acute stroke unit proposed to be Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton.

Option A	Option B
A single hyper acute stroke unit at Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton	
An acute stroke unit at both Musgrove Park Hospital and Yeovil District Hospital.	A single acute stroke unit at Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton.

What is a stroke?

A stroke is a life-threatening medical condition that happens when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off, either from a clot or if a blood vessel in the brain bursts (also known as a haemorrhage).

Stroke is a sudden and life-changing event, and is a leading cause of death and disability in the UK. The sooner you're treated, the better your chance of recovery. The type of treatment needed depends on the type of stroke, and whether it is caused by a bleed or a blockage, which can only be determined by expert diagnosis.

The NHS Long Term Plan set out the ambitions for the NHS over the next 10 years, identifying stroke as a national clinical priority. We share this ambition and want everyone in Somerset to have the best opportunity to survive and thrive after stroke.

With advances in effective stroke treatment, we can improve the way our acute hospital based stroke services are organised, preventing more stroke deaths each year.

Urgent stroke care best practice

Stroke doctors emphasise that to get the best possible outcomes, patients need to be seen by stroke specialists in a hyper acute stroke unit, even if that means a longer journey to reach the right hospital. These services should be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

National standards and best practice guidance on hyper acute stroke units state they should:

- run by a multi-disciplinary team of specialist stroke staff (that is, a team with a mix of professionals such as consultant doctors, radiologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, specialist stroke nurses, speech therapists, dietitians and so on)
- treating at least 500 confirmed stroke patients each year. This is to ensure the staff see enough patients to maintain their competency levels and build their expertise
- open 24 hours a day, seven days a week with access at all times to brain scanning equipment and clot-busting drugs (thrombolysis) and the consultant cover to review scans and provide thrombolysis
- admitting people quickly onto the unit avoiding waits in A&E
- offering patients and carers high quality information and support.

Neither of our hyper acute stroke units consistently work in this way in Somerset. By reorganising our hyper acute stroke services we could offer better stroke care for our patients.

By changing the way stroke services in Somerset are organised we could:

- Make sure that everyone has access to our specialist teams and treatments 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Meet the national standards for stroke care.
- Support staff better, attract and retain the specialist staff needed.
- Make the best use of resources to create a service fit for the future.
- Save more lives and help more people live well after stroke.

The proposals were reviewed by an independent Clinical Senate, a group of clinicians from outside of the area, who agreed that it would benefit patients and services.

Travel times

At the moment, someone who is thought to be having a stroke will usually be taken to the closest hospital that offers emergency stroke care. In Somerset, for most people this is Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton or Yeovil District Hospital in Yeovil.

If these proposals went ahead in the future, most patients would go to Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton. Some Somerset patients who live close to the border of surrounding counties would go to their nearest hospital which could be in a neighbouring county such as Dorset County Hospital in Dorchester.

For some people this change would mean that their initial journey to hospital by ambulance could take longer. We've worked with South Western Ambulance Service (SWAST) to understand how this would impact on ambulance travel time to hospital.

- 77% of the population would be able to reach a hyper acute stroke unit within 45 minutes.
- 98% would be able to reach a hyper acute stroke unit within 60 minutes.

Although patients are more likely to be taken to a hospital closer to where they live, ambulance crews make decisions based on a number of different factors.

Getting to hospital quickly is really important when you have a stroke, but it's also really important to be seen by specialist staff quickly when you arrive and to have access to the best treatment available. One hyper acute stroke unit at Musgrove Park Hospital would be better able to support this care by providing rapid access to the right expertise and specialist equipment.

This means that even if some journeys to hospital were slightly longer, there would still be an overall benefit to patients.

More information on travel times is available in the consultation document and the Pre-Consultation Business Case on our website - www.somersetics.org.uk/stroke

For more information contact:

Somicb.communications@nhs.net