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Successful scheme to reduce avoidable hospital admissions to be extended within North Cumbria

Posted on Thursday 5th March 2015

A successful scheme to reduce avoidable hospital admissions for patients living across North Cumbria is now in place following a decision by NHS Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

This means local GPs working more closely with the ambulance service so that patients living in Allerdale, Copeland, Carlisle and Eden are only taken to hospital if an assessment shows they cannot be treated at home or in the community.

The Pathfinder scheme has been working successfully overnight and at weekends in these areas since early 2014. During this time North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust (NWAS) and Cumbria Health on Call (CHoC), which provides GP out of hours services, have been working closely to reduce hospital admissions where these can be avoided by providing care and treatment at home or in the community.

And now the GP-led CCG has agreed that the scheme should be extended to involve local GP practices during day time hours for a six month pilot period.

Under the Pathfinder scheme guidance is used by the paramedics to assess patients to decide whether or not they need to be taken to an acute hospital. If the call out is overnight and the assessment by the paramedics shows the patient is very poorly they would be taken immediately to hospital. However, if the assessment shows the patient could be cared for at home or in the community, the paramedics contact CHoC for advice. They are called back as a priority and an action plan agreed which could mean a visit to the patient by an out of hours GP, telephone advice given to the patient and their family or carer by an out of hours GP, arrangements made for a district nurse to call or the advice could be that the patient would be better treated at hospital.

During the daytime pilot similar arrangements will be in place but involving the patient's own local GPs. As well as a visit or advice by the GP or attendance by another community healthcare professional, alternatives to being taken to hospital could also include taking the patient to an urgent care centre such as the newly opened urgent care centre at Keswick Community Hospital or at Workington Community Hospital if this was considered to be the most appropriate response for the patient.

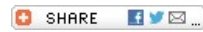
Dr David Rogers, CCG medical director said: "We know that due to the distances involved travelling to hospital is an issue for many patients and their families and carers. We also know that our hospital accident and emergency departments are constantly under great pressure. As such we have pledged to do all that we can to reduce travelling and to providing more care and support for people in their own homes and in the community and also to making sure that people are only taken to hospital if they really need to be there.

"The Pathfinder scheme is working successfully in South Cumbria and other parts of the North West and since early last year patients in North Cumbria have benefited from the scheme being available out of hours. This has shown that following a call to the ambulance service, where patients fit the criteria for the Pathfinder service, the majority could be treated in their own home or at an urgent care centre. As a result we think we could reduce the number of patients being taken to A&E by about 75% and over the next six months we will be monitoring its progress within North Cumbria very carefully."

Pathfinder area manager for NWAS Simon McCrory said: "This increased provision means that after a clinical assessment on-scene, NWAS clinicians can refer appropriate patients to CHOC, who will then manage a clinician to clinician handover, linking the patient's own GP with the paramedic. This provides the patient with the right care, at the right time, in the place in line with their immediate care needs.

“This successful scheme is the latest in a range of innovative alternatives to being taken to hospital for patients, which all aim to deliver improved outcomes and quality of care for patients throughout Cumbria.”

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