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NHS 70

2018

2017

News

Floods 2015

Social media

 Communications and
 Engagement Team

Picture library

Video library

Useful links

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[Homepage](#) » [News](#) » [Dr Neela Shabde retires](#)

Dr Neela Shabde retires

Posted on Wednesday 23rd March 2016

One of Cumbria's most senior paediatricians is retiring.

Dr Neela Shabde came to Cumbria more than five years ago and she has played a key role in developing children's services and the county's Sexual Assault Support Service The Bridgeway.

She came to Cumbria from the North East to be the Medical Director for Children for the Cumbria Primary Care Trust (PCT), and then became Clinical Director for Children and Families for the NHS Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group.

Dr Shabde said: "It has been a great pleasure and privilege to work in Cumbria, and would like to thank everyone for their friendship and support."

During her time in the county, Dr Shabde has overseen developments in children's health services and partnership working, as well as being instrumental in the opening of The Bridgeway. The service opened in December 2015 with the support of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Richard Rhodes; this has significantly improved the access, health care and support to the victims of sexual assault in Cumbria.

Dr Shabde has worked with children and young people who have been the victims of sexual assault since 1989, helping to develop the North East paediatric forensic network in 2004. When Neela arrived in the county she raised the issue of a lack of services, and went on to lead a multi-agency working group after the Care Quality Commission raised concerns about the lack of local of services in 2012.

She said: "I knew there had been several attempts to develop a service like this in Cumbria. Once the CQC had raised concerns about this, we were able to see some real progress with the partnerships and get it moving forward. The Police and Crime Commissioner, Richard Rhodes, was very committed to making this happen and we worked together along with NHS England, NHS Cumbria CCG, public health, Police, the county and district councils, and the voluntary sector. I can't thank Mr Rhodes enough for his support which was key in making this new service a reality."

She added: "The Bridgeway is unique in that it provides health assessments by specially trained doctor or nurse to carry out a forensic medical examination and offer appropriate health care support to victims, in addition The Bridgeway provides an independent sexual violence advocacy and access to specialist counselling services. I believe that with early intervention and the right level of support, we can help victims of sexual assault become survivors."

Since it opened, The Bridgeway service has seen more than 30 people at the medical examination centre in Penrith – with just less than half of those being under the age of 16. Many more have accessed countywide emotional, practical and therapeutic support. The helpline and medical forensic service is available to the victims of sexual assault 24 hours a day. Advice and counselling is available too on week days, the number to call is 0808 118 6432.

Dr Shabde has enjoyed working in partnership throughout her career she has tried to bring organisations to work together more closely and collaboratively.



She said: "I am very passionate about improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of children and treating them holistically. It is not about treating the disease or the physical symptoms, but looking at the child as a whole, with full consideration of their emotional wellbeing and mental health. Prevention, early recognition and intervention gives children a much better chance of having a healthy childhood and better life chances as an adult."

Director of Children and Families for NHS Cumbria CCG Eleanor Hodgson said: "Neela has been a great advocate for children and young people in Cumbria and has worked tirelessly to improve the services they receive. Her work particularly with the Bridgeway service has left a lasting legacy for which she can be very proud. We will all miss her a great deal."

Dr Shabde retires on March 31st.

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