



15th September 2020

NHS leaders asked to address concerns about closure of children's emergency services

Healthwatch Camden is calling on senior leaders in the NHS to move faster to address the concerns of Camden residents, following an announcement about substantial changes to emergency services for children and young people.

Preparations are being made for a possible second wave of Covid-19 patients this autumn. Part of these preparations will involve the temporary closure of emergency services for children at the Royal Free Hospital site in Hampstead, and the continued temporary closure of emergency services for children and young people at UCH.

These changes were announced on the 27th August and it is anticipated that they will come into effect before the end of September, although a precise date is yet to be confirmed.

Senior leaders in the NHS believe these changes will ensure that children in need of emergency care can be given the best and safest service possible over the autumn period.

Commenting on the announcement Matthew Parris, Director of Healthwatch Camden, said:

“When the public are asked about decision making in the NHS, there is a consistent message that the final decisions should be made by qualified health professionals.”

“But people do expect to be consulted on changes. And whilst this may not be possible for urgent and temporary changes, we do expect the NHS to ensure people have a say if any permanent and substantial changes are made.”

“Most families in Camden will trust local services to make the right decisions, but that trust cannot be taken for granted.”

Residents have told Healthwatch Camden that accessing hospital services safely, without risk of exposure to Covid-19, is very important to them. Therefore, efforts being made by the NHS to make children's emergency services safer and more resilient to a second wave of Covid-19 are likely to be welcomed.

However, patients have also told the health and care watchdog that they want services to stay close to home, in familiar settings, and that change can be unsettling.

Healthwatch Camden has heard from some Camden patients, with experience of attending the children's emergency department at the Royal Free or UCH hospitals, who have found the proposed closure of these services confusing and concerning.

Commenting on the changes, one parent said, "this worries me greatly". Another described it as "terrible news". And others expressed concern about how quickly the services will return to the Royal Free and whether the changes will, in fact, be temporary.

Mr Parris added:

"This is a significant change to emergency services for some of our sickest children. More clarity and reassurance are needed on the concerns raised by local people, for example, what will happen if a parent attends Royal Free with their child?"

"The timing and communication of the change could be critical, and we want to work with the NHS to ensure it gets this right. The intention was for these changes to take effect within the next fortnight and, so far, there has been very little communication about the changes."

Healthwatch Camden has referred the matter to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Camden Council in order to bring the matter to the attention of local politicians.

Local families concerned about these changes are being encouraged to contact Healthwatch Camden on 0207 3832 402 or via www.healthwatchcamden.co.uk

The Whittington Hospital in Archway on Magdala Avenue, N19 5NF is now the place to go for anyone in Camden needing urgent children's accident and emergency services. Barnet Hospital will also be providing accident and emergency services for children and young people.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. Healthwatch is the independent watchdog created to gather and represent the views of the public. Healthwatch plays a role at both national and local level to ensure that the views of people that use services are taken into account. It provides a collective voice for health and social care users in Camden.
2. Healthwatch Camden has a seat on the Camden Health and Wellbeing Board and can alert Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to concerns about services.

3. Local Healthwatch functions and powers are set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. This includes the power to refer its concerns to the local Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
4. For more information about Camden's Health Overview and Scrutiny:
<http://cindex.camden.gov.uk/kb5/camden/cd/service.page?id=5PvwQb882z4>
5. For more information contact: 07939 315580, email:
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