

## The future of specialist gynaecological cancer centre services

Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust run one of several specialist gynaecological cancer centres in the West Midlands. Others operate from UHMN in Stoke and RWT at New Cross, but the centre at SWB has the best long and short term survival rates in the country and is the only higher specialist training unit. It also has strong research output and works closely with major national funding bodies including key sector charities.

In April 2016 a funding decision was made, and adjudicated nationally, which cut 40% of the budget from the service. The Trust, after much deliberation, decided that it could not provide appropriate quality with the revised funding settlement and consequently issued notice to commissioners on the service. That notice period was one year.

For the intervening four years the Trust has nonetheless provided this service with a rolling financial settlement that covers the costs of excellence. The Trust has continued to invest in the service and sought to develop it, notwithstanding the profound uncertainty for staff who anticipated relocating to another Birmingham centre, or elsewhere. Long term funding bids, for example, for research, have undoubtedly been affected by the prolonged period of uncertainty.

NHS England led both a patient-facing and a clinical consensus process from 2018 to determine what should happen in commissioning a replacement specialist service. That process concluded that the centre should be re-commissioned (not rationalised into other centres regionally) and that the conurbation of Birmingham needed such a centre. Partners from BCWC, UHB and RWT worked together to try and develop a replacement proposal. That proposal has not gone forward and during 2019-20 those involved indicated that they foresaw considerable difficulty in bringing it to fruition.

The Trust had indicated that the re-start of the Midland Metropolitan Hospital build marked the last opportunity for those involved to either define a new location or put in place another long term arrangements for this specialist centre. **In January 2020 NHS England concluded their considerations and confirmed their intention that the long term future of the centre would as part of the Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, with complex surgery based in the Midland Met.**

The multi-year agreement secures the funded future of the specialist centre. It allows Trust clinicians, patient groups, and research partners to consider how now to develop the centre as the acknowledged regional, and in time national leader, in this field. The agreement includes some capital restitution for the work to be done with Midland Met and the Trust has made a commitment to ensuring that critical care capacity for the service is sufficient and prevents surgical cancellations. The Trust has the core co-locations required by the national specification and will work with neighbours like University Hospitals Birmingham to

ensure that disciplines like upper GI surgical support are available for the handful of selected cases where this is necessary.

For most patients using the centre, their initial care will continue to take place at the local hospital. Around 400 patients each year will use the 'tertiary' complex care centre. Wherever possible follow up and long term support will take place locally. For some patients they will receive chemotherapy, alongside or in advance of surgery, and from 2021 we would expect that to take place at the Trust's sites as part of the upcoming oncology reconfiguration which will return services to the local area from the Queen Elizabeth.

The Trust operates a number of specialist services as a major University teaching centre, notwithstanding a primary role as a provider of integrated care across general practice, social, community and hospital care services for our local populations in Sandwell, Perry Barr and Ladywood. These Beacons of Excellence include our specialist eye hospital, urological stone surgery, some orthopaedic and colorectal services, the region's Behcet's service, specialist rheumatological care for Lupus and arthritis, children's allergy care for Birmingham, and leading the Midlands regional centre for sickle cell and thalassemia provision. Each beacon is delivered in partnership with others, and the future of gynaecological cancer centre will reflect that commitment to patient involvement, innovation and collaboration.

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Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust

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