

1 September 2020

To members of the Governing Body

### **Keeping A&E safe and free for urgent and emergency care**

As we continue to manage the COVID-19 Pandemic it is clear, as services safely reopen and people try to get back to 'normal' life, we need to consider how we put measures in place to protect patients, staff and ultimately the NHS in preparation for the expected difficult winter period.

As you will be aware, across County Durham and Darlington over recent years there has been a lot of work undertaken to direct the public and patients to the right service for their needs.

Due to social distancing and infection precautions, the space available in A&E to care for people and allow NHS staff to work safely has been reduced by 30-50 per cent. Therefore, this work is more important than ever.

With around 70 per cent of attendances at A&E made up of patients who walk-in and now with reduced space in waiting rooms - we need to consider how we best keep people safe - especially our most vulnerable and shielded patients.

Therefore, we are doing further work to encourage and educate our local populations about choosing the most appropriate service, and asking people not just to turn up at A&E.

Across County Durham, we are asking the public to choose the right service for them, by thinking about pharmacy, GP and 111 online first, and not to just turn up to A&E. In addition, we are asking people to act responsibly and consider carefully the impact drug use and alcohol has

on people behaviours which can increase demands within A&E departments.

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group are working together to promote the most appropriate services for different conditions, to book patients into the most appropriate care and so that if patients do attend A&E but do not need to be there, they can be re-directed to a more appropriate service.

This work is aligned to a national directive and there are plans for this to develop into a full regional campaign. A pilot of the programme launched in the north integrated care partnership area (Newcastle, Gateshead, North Tyneside and Northumberland) in August. County Durham is part of the central integrated care partnership with Sunderland and South Tyneside and work is underway to look at how this campaign can be developed and promoted at an ICP level.

We are putting these measures in place to support and guide the public to make the best choices about where to access their healthcare. This will help ensure their safety, as well as making sure they get the right treatment in the most appropriate place.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours

**Clair White**  
**Head of Commissioning**  
**County Durham CCG**

E-mail: [clairwhite1@nhs.net](mailto:clairwhite1@nhs.net)

Mobile: 0797 1895097