

Case study: Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Introduction

Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is a medium-sized acute hospital trust, providing inpatient, outpatient, emergency and specialist services to the roughly 275,000 residents of Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas.

The foundation trust is focused on Kettering Hospital with outpatient services also provided at Nene Park, Corby Diagnostic Centre, Prospect House and Isebrook Hospital. Kettering Hospital is located to the north west of the town and provides the only A&E service to the surrounding area.

The problem

The site of the emergency department at Kettering Hospital has long been recognised as incapable of delivering top quality modern emergency medicine. The hospital was originally designed to accommodate 45,000 attendances annually, but now sees almost 90,000.¹ National leaders have recognised the extent of the challenge with the site at Kettering, with Dr Kevin Reynard of the emergency care improvement programme concluding after a review in 2016, that:

“The current emergency department is the most cramped and limited emergency department I have ever come across in the UK, USA, Australia or India. I cannot see how the team, irrespective of crowding, can deliver a safe, modern emergency medicine service within the current footprint.”²

Despite improvements in recent years, including leaving special measures in May 2019, the trust has been rated as ‘requires improvement’ by Care Quality Commission (CQC), with a key point that the *“the design, maintenance, and use of facilities and premises did not always meet patients’ needs.”³* There are multiple references to practical challenges created by the site, including that:

- the paediatric emergency department is *“too small to accommodate the numbers of children attendances”*
- queuing patients could overhear conversations between reception and streaming staff at the reception desk

¹ Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Summary of the Urgent Care Hub Outline Business Case, accessed 23 August 2019

² Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Summary of the Urgent Care Hub Outline Business Case, accessed 23 August 2019; quoting from an email from Dr Kevin Reynard to Kettering General Hospital following his visit in January 2016

³ Care Quality Commission, Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust: Inspection report, 22 May 2019

- some other services were also described as “*cramped*”, with CQC noting that many parts of the estate do not meet current health building standards.

The current site of the emergency department is situated in a location that makes further expansion impossible.⁴ Indeed, many of the challenges with the current site result from the fact that the hospital has been forced to expand lineally in the past, meaning the current building is long and thin.

The impact

The inadequacy of the estate has major negative impacts on the staff, adult and paediatric patients who rely on the hospital:

- **Recruitment to the hospital is inhibited by the quality of the estate** – with challenges attracting staff to work in the challenging environment presented by the estate layout.⁵ Staff have to provide care in insufficient space leading to numerous challenges, including overcrowding, difficulties ensuring staff safety, and a lack of staff rest areas. In short, the estate directly impacts on staff wellbeing.
- **Patient care is directly impacted through overcrowding and increased waiting times.** CQC note that the current site design means that patient privacy is compromised, and patients can overhear staff conversations.⁶ They also note that that the trust is consistently worse than the national average for waiting times, partly as a result of the capacity challenge created by the estate.
- **Paediatric care is a particular crisis point.** CQC conclude that “the paediatric area in the urgent care department was too small for the population they served”, and included a re-assessment of the layout as a “must-do” in their report.

The solution

The trust recognises the challenges with the current site and the impact on capacity and quality it causes. While small scale capital projects have improved the situation in recent years, ultimately, these issues cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of the existing buildings.⁷

Working with partners in North Northamptonshire, the trust has therefore developed a comprehensive plan for a new build urgent care hub on the site of the current hospital car park. The new building will accommodate a modern, efficient urgent and emergency floor

⁴ Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Summary of the Urgent Care Hub Outline Business Case, accessed 23 August 2019

⁵ Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Summary of the Urgent Care Hub Outline Business Case, accessed 23 August 2019

⁶ Care Quality Commission, Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust: Inspection report, 22 May 2019

⁷ Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Summary of the Urgent Care Hub Outline Business Case, accessed 23 August 2019

and a co-located short stay and assessment area on a second floor. This co-located design is in line with national best practice for facilitating efficient patient flows.

To complete the new build the trust has submitted a capital bid for £50m of capital funding, but this was rejected in the February 2019 capital spending round (in which Northamptonshire was the only sustainability and transformation plan to receive no funding),⁸ and overlooked in the recent additional capital round.

Current demand projections predict that there will be over 130,000 attendances per annum in 2031/32,⁹ a newly built hospital is the only option for meeting this demand in a safe and efficient way.

⁸ HSJ, [Revealed: The winners and losers of government's £2.9bn capital pot](#), 21 February 2019

⁹ Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Summary of the Urgent Care Hub Outline Business Case, accessed 23 August 2019