NEW HOME FOR CANCER CARE AT CUMBERLAND INFIRMARY

Patients undergoing treatment for cancer will soon benefit from a new and improved healing environment as chemotherapy services gear up to move into a new home on the site of the Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle.

Currently cancer patients receive chemotherapy either in clinical oncology based in the lower ground floor or on ward Larch D at the Cumberland Infirmary. However from the 20 October, outpatient chemotherapy care for both haematology and oncology patients will be delivered from Reiver House. This is a standalone building on the hospital grounds that is being extensively refurbished with patient care in mind as part of a range of improvements to enhance cancer services at North Cumbria.

After listening to feedback from both patients, carers and staff, the new location which is away from the busy main hospital, aims to improve patient experience as well as bringing staff, currently located across two different parts of the hospital, together.

The new location at Reiver House is currently undergoing refurbishment work so that the relocated service will be able to treat 12 patients in a spacious environment. Initially only the chemotherapy service will move to Reiver House and outpatient oncology clinics will continue to be delivered in clinical oncology along with radiotherapy. This will be a significant improvement from the current offering that is spread out across different parts of the hospital.
The service move is led by consultant cancer nurse Helen Roe and chemotherapy manager Kate Lockhart, supported by the recently appointed MacMillan service redesign manager Amanda Platt and all of the chemotherapy nurses. The team will ensure that the patients remain at the centre of developments and welcome their input into the ongoing changes that will occur over the next few years.

Consultant cancer nurse Helen Roe said: “We are very excited at the prospect of being able to bring the chemotherapy services together in one place in an environment that is fit for purpose and will benefit so many people who are affected by cancer.

“It can be a traumatic experience when a person receives a cancer diagnosis not only for the patient in terms of the future and the treatment options, but also for their families and other people around them.

“Moving our chemotherapy service into one place in a purposely designed relaxing environment will undoubtedly have a positive impact for patients and play an important part in helping us to deliver the very best patient care and support we can.

“We are always looking at how we can further improve and this relocation, together with a number of key new appointments in our cancer care team, are big steps in the right direction for the future development of our services.”

One of the Trust’s new recruits is Macmillan service redesign manager Amanda Platt. She said: “We are developing a patient-centred approach across both of our hospitals and this is constantly being adapted in light of what patients and their families tell us.

“The hope is that the new suite at Reiver House will be a catalyst to evolving our cancer services even further as we continually look to improve the experience of patients and families undergoing care and treatment with us.”
North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust provides cancer care to thousands of patients and families across the county with dedicated teams at the Cumberland Infirmary and at West Cumberland Hospital in Whitehaven.

A detailed piece of work is currently being carried out, led by NHS England, to develop a new radiotherapy service for North Cumbria and to replace the radiotherapy machines at the Cumberland Infirmary which are now nearing the end of their expected lifespan after providing care to people in North Cumbria over a number of years.

Nicky Moon deputy director for clinical support and cancer services at both North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, said: “The move to Reiver House makes absolute sense from a patient experience point of view and will also be much better for staff delivering our chemotherapy service - bringing them together in one focused area. This is a great first step to developing our cancer services and has been carefully considered with both our patients and staffs’ best interests at heart.”

The procurement for a new radiotherapy service in North Cumbria is now underway but expected to take a number of years given the scale of investment and logistics required to replace underground radiotherapy bunkers and equipment. Once complete, however, it will result in a new locally based service using the very latest radiotherapy technology.

Dr Mike Prentice, medical director (Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear) at NHS England, said: “We have now started the complex process of securing a new radiotherapy service for North Cumbria, including the replacement of the radiotherapy machines.

“The aim is to create a link to a major cancer centre so the service can continue to develop into the future. This process, including the development of a new facility in
Carlisle, will take a number of years to complete and it is very positive news that local improvements are continuing to be made to support cancer services during this time.”

The move of chemotherapy services to Reiver House has been made possible following the successful transfer of ‘step-up, step-down’ care out of hospital and into the community by NHS Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group which is on course to be complete by 1 October.

NHS Cumbria CCG Carlisle locality lead GP, Dr Colin Patterson said: “The move began last month, and additional beds are being provided in a nursing home setting as well as the beds in community hospitals while staff undergo additional training.

“Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust staff are working with colleagues from North Cumbria University Hospital NHS Trust, Cumbria County Council, Carlisle City Council and the third sector to provide an alternative to hospital admission where appropriate, and ensure patients also receive community rehabilitation services at home.”