

AMBULANCE CHIEF'S SHOCK LETTER

MATERNITY PLANS ARE NOT SAFE



HEALTH EXCLUSIVE

BY PAMELA MCGOWAN

CONTROVERSIAL plans to send mums in labour from Whitehaven to Carlisle have been dealt a huge blow, as we reveal Cumbria's ambulance boss did not believe they were safe.

The News & Star has seen a leaked letter sent by Derek Cartwright, chief executive of the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust, to the Success Regime, raising concerns. Sent as an official response on December 19, the final date of the public consultation, he states: "The trust does not believe this option delivers a clinically safe transfer package for high acute cases."

The trust has, however, stated it now "fully supports" the plans.

Full story: Pages 4&5

Letter: Derek Cartwright



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Today: Cold with doud, drizzle and snow flurries for southern and central Britain. Brighter in the north, although snow showers will move in from the east through the day. Western areas are likely to see the best of the driest and brightest conditions, although outbreaks of drizzle are likely in the far south-west towards the end of the day.

UK Outlook: It will be a cold day on Friday, with further snow showers moving in from the east, these more isolated in the north, where there will be some decent spells of sunshine. The showers will tend to dissipate by the evening, leaving some clear spells. Saturday will be cold once more, with outbreaks of rain and snow moving in from the east throughout the day. Remaining dry in the west.

LATE CHEMISTS

CARLISLE: Asda, Kingstown, 9am-9pm; Sainsbury's, Bridge Street, 7am-11pm; Tesco, Rosehill, 8am-8pm.

COCKERMOUTH: Boots, 56-58 Main Street, 8.30am-6pm; JWW Allison & Son, 31 Main Street, 9am-6.30pm.

KESWICK: Boots, 31 Main Street, 9am-5.30pm; Co-op Pharmacy, 25 Main Street, 9am-5.30pm; JN Murray, 17 Station Street, 9am-5pm.

MARYPORT: HS Dobies, 29 Curzon Street, 9am-5.30pm; AF Norman, 55 Senhouse Street, 9am-5.30pm.

PENRITH: Morrisons In-store Pharmacy, Brunswick Road, Mon-Wed 8am-8pm, Thurs/Fri 8am-9pm. Sainsbury's Pharmacy, 1 Common Garden Square, 7am-10pm.

WHITEHAVEN: Morrisons, Flatt Walks, 8am-8pm; Tesco Bransty Row, 8.30am-5.30pm.

WIGTON: Co-op Pharmacy, Wigton Health Centre, Southend, 9am-6.30pm; Well Pharmacy, 14 King Street, 8.45am-5.30pm; Well Pharmacy, Wigton Medical Centre, South End, 9am-6.30pm.

WORKINGTON: Asda Pharmacy, Dunmail Park Shopping Centre, Maryport Road, Mon 8am-11pm; Tues-Fri 7am-11pm; Boots, Murray Road, Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9am-5.30pm, Wed 9am-8pm; W Gourlay, 25-27 Oxford Street, 9am-6pm; JH Sandham, 64 Harrington Road, 9am-6pm; JH Sandham, Oxford Street, 9am-5pm; FC Whelan, 72 John Street, 9am-6pm; JS Urwin, Seaton, 9am-6pm.

HIGH TIDES

TODAY

Silloth 10.25am (6.9m) & 10.53pm (7.1m)

Workington 10.08am (9.1m) & 10.36pm (9.2m)

TOMORROW

Silloth 11.14am (7.3m) & 11.40pm (7.3m)

Workington 10.56am (9.5m) & 11.21pm (9.4m)

LIGHTING UP TIMES

Tonight 5.36pm to 7.14am

Tomorrow 5.39pm to 7.12am

PRESSURES GROW ON HEALTH CHIEFS TO PROTECT Cuts safety fears of ambulance boss

AMBULANCE boss Derek Cartwright told health chiefs that he did not believe controversial plans to transfer women more than 40 miles while in labour were clinically safe, the *News & Star* can exclusively reveal.

He also claimed transfer times quoted by the Success Regime were underestimated, that the proposals failed to meet vital guidance on emergency caesareans and even stated that paramedics could refuse to transport patients if they felt it unsafe.

The *News & Star* has seen a copy of a letter sent by Mr Cartwright, chief executive of the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust, to the Success Regime raising these concerns.

His organisation, however, insists it now "fully supports" the radical proposal.

The letter is dated December 19, the final day of the Healthcare for the Future public consultation over its controversial plans to cut services and beds across north and west Cumbria.

NWAS is technically part of the Success Regime, with

EXCLUSIVE BY PAMELA MCGOWAN
Health reporter

some of its senior staff sitting on the panel during public meetings.

But Mr Cartwright's letter revealed that the ambulance service did not support all of the preferred options put forward – and had particular reservations about the plan to centralise maternity consultants in Carlisle, leaving only a midwife-led unit in Whitehaven.

In it he stated: "The trust does not believe this option delivers a clinically safe transfer package for high acute cases.

"We are also concerned that the transfer times within the consultation document have been underestimated. A blue light transfer between West Cumberland Hospital (WCH) and Cumberland Infirmary Carlisle (CIC) is, on average, 50 minutes travel time.

"This does not take into account end to end time, eg. a patient in community outside of WCH, eg. Seascale, which could take in excess of one hour, or the timing of when the midwife considers esca-



Derek Cartwright: Concerned over transport times

lation is appropriate for the patient. The transport time to Carlisle is vastly greater than documented in the consultation."

He added that it also breaches national safety guidelines.

"We believe that from the moment a decision is made for a pregnant patient to be transferred, the whole process will far exceed the NICE (National Institute of Clinical Excellence) guidelines for emergency caesareans which are 30 or 45 minutes, and no risk management plans have been identified for this."

Mr Cartwright is also worried that paramedics do not have the skills to deal with the high-risk patients being transferred.

The Success Regime has previously used Wales as an example of a dedicated ambulance being used to transfer women in labour large distances. Mr Cartwright said his staff have visited the area but are still concerned about the use of paramedics in these cases and who would take responsibility for patients.

"It should be clearly understood throughout this exercise that if a paramedic is presented with a patient who sits outside of their scope of practice they are absolutely within their right to decline to transport them," he wrote.

And Mr Cartwright warned the rise in demand for ambulance services could also impact on emergency cover.

He added: "If high risk patients in deprived areas do not have transport or access to transport to self-mobilise to Cumberland Infirmary Carlisle for their birth, the trust will be asked to provide transport to the consultant-led unit which could again potentially

affect domestic cover and our ability to respond."

David Atkinson, of health union Unison, said the letter expressed some of the concerns raised with them and praised the chief executive for flagging them up.

An NWAS spokesperson said: "NWAS is a supportive contributor to the Success Regime and has been fully involved in the recent public consultation exercise. The concerns contained within the NWAS consultation submission related to the clinical support arrangements for certain maternity patients being transferred from the Whitehaven site to Carlisle. NWAS is assured by the work undertaken jointly to address these points and will continue to fully engage with colleagues from the Acute Trust and wider Regime to work through the finer details of the various consultation options in close partnership.

"Now assured, NWAS fully supports the stated preferred approach set out in Option 2 of the consultation document in relation to maternity services."

■ Comment: Page 12

SERVICES AND COMMUNITY BEDS ACROSS NORTH CUMBRIA Audit report is 'wake-up call'



REVELATIONS that national plans to treat more patients at home are neither easing pressure on acute hospitals nor saving money, have strengthened calls for community hospital beds to be saved.

The National Audit Office (NAO) published the findings in a report about the impact of a £5.3m Better Care Fund, which aims to help local authorities across England to keep patients out of hospital.

It is part of a national drive to join up health and social care services, reduce bed-blocking and save millions of pounds.

But following the review, the NAO said there was "no compelling evidence" to show that integrating services "leads to sustainable financial savings or reduced hospital activity".

Local health campaigners say the report backs up the case against closing cottage hospital beds across north and west Cumbria – as is currently planned by the Success Regime.

Jane Mayes, from Alston, said it should be a wake-up call to health bosses, and



Fighting to save beds: Residents Jane Mayes and Alix Martin, with Dr Mark Crick at Alston hospital

Regime plans will have on unpaid family carers.

She said there are problems across the wider health and social care system, which make it even more difficult to join up services.

"The plans for full integration will always be difficult to achieve given the fragmented and uncertain climate social care/primary care are currently operating in," she explained.

Dawn Kenyon, chief executive of Carlisle Carers, is worried about the impact Success

"Home Care providers are struggling to provide care at the price set by councils and we have a disturbing trend in care home failure and closure, making any plans for integration at best difficult if not impossible to achieve."

Mrs Kenyon added that health and social care are in a constant state of change via reorganisation, restructure and realignment.

"Cuts to council budgets are

creating an unstable environment for any provider to operate in, this in turn leaves unpaid carers to carry the burden in many cases and all areas of health and social care are struggling to meet rising demand," she added.

"Any changes in health and social care must be stress tested against the impact it will have on unpaid family carers there is little evidence that this is happening."

Beds news boosts campaign

A HEALTH campaigner claims the opening of temporary beds at community hospitals in Maryport and Cockermouth is proof of how vital they are to the health service.

Ellerbeck Ward at Workington Community Hospital closed in December after a specialist report highlighted fire safety issues.

The trust has been running a temporary service from the previously vacant Ward 3B at Whitehaven's West Cumberland Hospital while work continues to reopen the 14-bed Workington site, but that ward will now close.

Three temporary beds will be opened at Maryport's Victoria Cottage Hospital and three at Cockermouth Community Hospital from tomorrow.

Bill Barnes, chairman of the Save Our Beds campaign which has fought to protect health services in Maryport, said: "It just shows how vital a part the community hospitals can play in our health service.

"It's another reason why the beds at Maryport need to be kept and possibly increased.

"It's good news on the face of it and I hope it's a sign that Maryport still has a big part to play."

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service agreed Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust should not admit any more patients on Ellerbeck Ward until the fire safety issues have been rectified.

Ward 3B is used as an escalation ward by North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust and due to growing winter pressures it is required once again for this purpose, leading to the closure of the temporary ward.

Campaigner urges health bosses to listen

A HEALTH campaigner has hit back at hospital chiefs for trying to dismiss concerns raised by one of their senior maternity consultants.

Jan den Bak, of the West Cumbrians' Voice for Healthcare group, believes alternative ideas that could make consultant-led maternity services in Whitehaven sustainable have not been fully explored.

He is now appealing to bosses to start listening to genuine safety concerns, saying it is not too late to find a better way.

The *News & Star* revealed last week that Andre Hamilton, labour ward lead at the West Cumberland Hospital, had written to Prime Minister Theresa May to stress that



Adding his voice: Jan den Bak

local clinicians did not support Success Regime plans to centralise consultant-led maternity in Carlisle.

She refuted previous claims that this option has clinical support and said bosses have been repeatedly told by obstetricians and midwives that it would be dangerous for women to travel to Carlisle.

She was backed by Suresh Rao, chairman of the local Medical Staff Committee, who claimed it has been "difficult to get any rational discussion" with bosses about the maternity plans.

But Rod Harpin, medical director at North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust, insisted that was not the case, claiming the trust was "fully engaged" with consultants and they agreed that, if consultant-led units could not be kept at both hospitals, alternatives must be explored.

Dr den Bak has hit back.

"I feel I cannot leave Dr Harpin's reaction to the brave and honest letter from Dr Hamilton unchallenged," he told the *News & Star*.

"Being fully engaged with

obstetrics and gynaecology consultants doesn't mean they are listening or even taking their concerns, and solutions, seriously."

Dr den Bak went on to claim that at least one maternity consultant in Carlisle has said they believe a consultant-led unit in Whitehaven could be made sustainable.

"Some of the other obstetric and gynaecology consultants have different opinions behind closed doors to what comes out in public," he added.

He went on to challenge statements from bosses about issues raised by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

But Dr den Bak said this was not permission to push through changes that are

widely opposed by consultants, midwives, ambulance staff, GPs and the public.

"The CQC does not have the remit to suggest, let alone ask, that the trust stop providing paediatric and maternity services at the Whitehaven hospital," he added.

He also praised recent recruitment successes, flagged up by the CQC.

Dr den Bak pointed out that trust chief executive Stephen Eames and Success Regime boss Sir Neil McKay have both said publicly that they would like to retain 24/7 consultant-led maternity at Whitehaven if possible. Yet when possible solutions have been put forward by clinicians, he accused them of showing no willingness to take these forward.

'Look overseas to solve recruitment' – MP

A CUMBRIAN MP has written to Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt urging him to look overseas to fill shortfalls in the recruitment of doctors in Cumbria.

In her letter, Workington MP Sue Hayman said the Success Regime is using recruitment problems to justify moving services from the West Cumberland Hospital in Whitehaven to Carlisle's Cumberland Infirmary.

However, the feeling of uncertainty about local services was putting people off applying for jobs, amid concern they would be short term.

The regime is reviewing healthcare across north, east and West Cumbria.

Mrs Hayman told the Health Secretary: "The West-lakes Medical Campus near Whitehaven is an exciting prospect, allowing us to train medical staff locally, however this will only come to fruition in the long-term, due to the amount of time taken to train clinicians.

"What urgent and neces-



Plea: Sue Hayman has written to the Health Secretary

ary action is being taken in the short-term in order to recruit the adequate number of staff to deliver all services safely in Whitehaven?"

"There is evidence that sufficient people are interested in applying for jobs in west Cumbria, if they are given sufficient support from human resources, and incentives to move.

"Is there anything that can be done by Government in

order to strengthen the human resources provision in the NHS in Cumbria?"

Mrs Hayman's letter continues: "The trust must be encouraged to allow any locum consultant who wishes to move onto a substantive permanent post to do so, with any relevant training and support package provided if necessary.

"Will the government ensure that consultants at the

West Cumberland Hospital are being treated in the same way as those at the Cumberland Infirmary?"

Mrs Hayman urged Mr Hunt to look overseas to fill vacancies for paediatricians, amid a national chronic shortage.

She added: "I implore you to ensure that recruitment of additional paediatric doctors is encouraged, through a range of innovative means, and that any clinicians from overseas do not fall foul of our immigration laws.

"The successes in recruitment that we have had in Cumbria recently need to be recognised and publicised widely, particularly the efforts of the local hospital league of friends in recruiting nursing staff.

"Given the right support from national NHS bodies, and recognition that the solutions for healthcare systems such as that in Cumbria are very different from London, as well as additional investment, we will be able to solve many of the problems."

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