**29 May 2020**

**Routine referrals and care at NHS and independent sector hospitals**

All NHS and many of the independent sector hospitals (ISPs) have been working together to help support our local response to caring for those patients with COVID-19.  At the moment this means that for some areas of routine care where we have normally been able to provide a wider choice of hospital providers, this is not currently available.  This is because many of the independent sector hospitals, including Clifton Park Hospital and Nuffield Hospital York have re-focused their resources to support local NHS Trusts, and therefore are currently unable to accept referrals.

The RSS is still offering patients a choice of those providers who are accepting routine referrals and not part of the national COVID-19 response contracts.

**Where patients are choosing to be treated at their local NHS hospital, all hospitals are now working to re-start accepting routine referrals – the latest position is as follows:**

For York FT starting receiving routine referrals again as of 7 May 2020

For LTH: still not receiving routine referrals as of 29 May 2020; advice & guidance available

For HDFT: starting receiving routine referrals again as of 18 May 2020

For HUTH all referrals are being accepted and clinically assessed.

For S Tees: still not receiving routine referrals

York Trust hospitals referrals are being processed through a Clinical Assessment Service (CAS) and held by the Consultants so that they have oversight of every single patient who is waiting for their outpatient care, surgery or diagnostics, whether this is a fast-track, urgent or routine.

The Trust and its Consultants are considering the capacity there is available locally for treating non-COVID patients, which includes the capacity available at independent sector providers. Alongside this they are working with NHSE/I and other acute providers in the HCV to develop the clinical prioritisation process which will support decisions about which patients to treat where, and when, as capacity becomes available for routine care.

The infection control guidelines for delivering acute care safely for non-COVID patients and our staff means the capacity available to deliver routine elective care is significantly reduced moving forward.

This will mean waiting times are longer than before the COVID-19 pandemic and may be so for some time.

The waiting times for many specialties will be the same across all providers because they are based on prioritising those with the highest clinical needs, and as outlined above for some specialties there is no choice of provider currently.

This work to understand how to safely re-start routine elective care is work in progress and is complex to establish across multiple care areas and specialties.

However, regular updates will be provided to both primary care clinicians, and patients who are contacting the RSS, so they are clear on when wider independent sector choice is available, and the process for patients to be scheduled in for their routine care whether at NHS or independent sector hospitals.

We would therefore ask you to encourage your patients who are already on a waiting list to remain on the waiting list at their chosen provider should they ask to be referred to Clifton Park or the Nuffield Hospitals instead.

For new referrals, should patients state that they do not wish to be referred until the independent sector hospitals accept referrals again, the RSS will have no alternative other to return the referral to the referring GP. The GP will be advised that the patient has been informed of the current position with lack of choice and to request a referral at a later date.

We would encourage you to support them in progressing their referral with their local NHS provider as this provides them with the best possible way to progress towards receiving care when capacity is available.