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All GPs
PCT Chief Executives
PCT Directors of Commissioning

Friday, 11 August 2006

Dear Colleague,

Re: Outpatient Services at West Herts. Hospitals

You may be aware of the changes to the services that the trust provides which will take place over the next six months. Our local Primary Care Trusts have made significant reductions in the levels of activity commissioned from this trust during 2006-07. These changes reflect the PCTs' expectations that referrals to secondary care services will fall as a result of developments in primary care, including the establishment of CAS / CATS services, and that the number of follow-up appointments being offered to patients in selected specialties will reduce. The impact on WHHT's activity levels will become greater as the year progresses, but overall the reduction in activity levels commissioned amounts to some 40,000 attendances in the current year, with a commensurate reduction in the trust's income of £6.8m. These figures will be greater next year as the full year effect of the reductions takes effect.

The trust is under great pressure to reduce its capacity to more closely match the levels of activity commissioned, and thus begin to address the income loss. In order to achieve this and to extract the maximum savings from these changes we have decided that we should aim to close our main outpatient departments at Watford, Hemel Hempstead and St Albans for the full day on Fridays. This will enable us to make savings amongst support staff and services that would otherwise continue to be needed five days a week, but would be underemployed.

Achieving such a major change is a difficult process and will take some time to work through. Many of our services are provided in stand-alone or specialised facilities and each of these will need to be assessed and plans for change agreed. We will be taking this work forward as quickly as we can from September.

I appreciate that there may be some degree of inconvenience for individual patients and GPs in these changes, and I apologise for this. However, the trust is facing enormous financial pressures and we must act quickly to avoid these becoming worse.

If you have any queries regarding the background to these changes or the steps that we are taking please let me or Nick Evans, the Director of Service Redesign, know.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Law". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

David Law
Chief Executive

Copy: Thom Hanahoe
Trust Executive
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