

Press release – Urgent Care Plans Concerns

The plans for two new Urgent Treatment Centres in Shropshire has set the blue lights flashing at Bishop's Castle Patients Group. The break-up of Shropshire's A&E departments, an essential ingredient of the Future Fit model of care, is foretold in the latest consultation by Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group about how the new Urgent Treatment Centres might operate.

Future Fit promised two Urgent Care Centres (now renamed Urgent Treatment Centres), one each at Shrewsbury and Telford hospitals. They would handle all of the non-emergency workload, or two thirds in total, of the current A&E's activity. Patients were told that these centres would be open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Before the new Emergency Department is open in Shrewsbury and the full closure of the two A&E's takes place, NHS bosses plan to build up the existing two small Urgent Care Centres at Shrewsbury and Telford. A private contractor provides the services there. They are not part of the main NHS A&E departments.

Jan Arriens, chair of the Bishop's Castle group, has responded to the time-limited, 12-day consultation, about the interim Urgent Treatment Centres. "In Future Fit there was no mention of patients booking appointments through calling NHS 111; everyone is 'a walk-in patient'. Having a booking may suit some patients but 'walk-in patients' must be treated equally. There is a real risk that a remote booking system will force patients back to their already overstretched GP's."

Another concern raised is that the Centres will have fixed 9 till 9 opening times, not 24 hours, and may not be open at peak times of early morning or late evening.

"The biggest concern," said Jan, "is that the Urgent Treatment Centres are being put out to tender. Our Group wants to see the Emergency Department and the two Centres led, managed and staffed within the NHS, not the break-up of NHS. Having Centres privately operated will inevitably result in boundaries with the Emergency Department to the detriment of patients. Future Fit did not spell out this public/private model of service delivery and we are sure it is not what patients want. The CCG should stop the tender and work for a fully integrated NHS service delivered by Shropshire and Telford hospitals."