

Breast Services Update – July 2021

New patients

There has been further significant improvement in the two week wait position for new patients with everyone being booked inside of the 14 days which is encouraging (March 2021 was probably the most difficult time ever during the pandemic).

The team is seeing on average 208 referrals per week.

The two week wait (2WW) clinics are held at Solihull Hospital, Good Hope Hospital and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Patients are offered the first available appointment regardless of their address. If patients need to use/choose to use a particular hospital then the first available appointment is offered at that site.

Caution: COVID is not going away any time soon and any increase in positive cases will mean that the team could be diverted to other clinical areas. As we move into the school holidays, more staff will be taking annual leave in the next couple of months which also impacts on staff availability.

Patients waiting for surgery

The pressure of caring for large numbers of patients seriously unwell with COVID-19 has led to longer delays for the growing number of patients on the waiting list. The Trust was placed under enormous pressure in wave 1 and also during the second wave of the virus (November 2020 to 3 March 2021). The Trust acknowledges that waiting for surgery is a very stressful time both for the patient and their family members and the team is doing everything it can to bring the service 'back into line'. The impact of cases post 'Freedom Day' is still an unknown.

Urgent category 2 patients¹ are the current priority within the Breast Service, with some Category 3 and 4 patients having their surgical procedures when possible where there is some additional theatre capacity.

Some breast reconstruction procedures have also recommenced but cancellation of elective surgery may still occur due to access to surgical beds and availability of surgical and clinical teams.

Surgical procedures are being carried out at Solihull Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Hospital, with theatres allocation under regular review. Surgery at Little Aston Hospital has now stopped.

Patients requiring follow up appointments in the breast service.

¹ Patients requiring surgery during the COVID-19 crisis have been classified in the following groups:

Priority level 1a Emergency - operation needed within 24 hours; Priority level 1b Urgent - operation needed with 72 hours; Priority level 2 Surgery that can be deferred for up to 4 weeks; Priority level 3 Surgery that can be delayed for up to 3 months; Priority level 4 Surgery that can be delayed for more than 3 months.

Outpatient activity occurs at Good Hope Hospital, Solihull Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Any short notice changes to outpatient appointments have mainly been due to a lack of radiology staff and also sickness in the department with some routine follow-up activity stepped down. Lack of radiologists unfortunately remains a national problem.

Any patient who is in routine follow up with the breast service and has a concern is invited to contact the breast care nurses (phone numbers shown later). Having listened to the concern, the nurses can provide further advice and support; if necessary, they can arrange for patients to be seen in the rapid access clinic.

New ways of working

The Trust has been meeting the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) monthly to look at new ways of delivering care.

We have agreement from the CCG to triage patients who are 35 years and under who present **without** a breast lump who can be managed by advice and guidance rather than being seen in the 2 Week Wait (2WW) clinics. This has been very successful to date with very few of the patients requiring the need to be offered a 2WW appointment, freeing up clinic space for patients of greater priority.

There is an Advice and Guidance Service for GPs. This service provides information to GPs that require Breast specialist advice regarding a patient's medical presentation.

Patient information and support

In order to reduce the COVID infection risk for cancer patients, all face to face Health and Well-being clinics have been suspended. We continue to review our approach to when we will be able to reintroduce these meetings. However, both Solihull and the QE Breast Care Clinical Nurse specialists have phone lines available for advice and support. If the call is not answered straight away, there is an answer phone facility. This is checked regularly Monday to Friday between 8 am and 6pm at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Solihull Hospital also has an answerphone but messages left after 3pm may not always be answered until the next working day as staff will be working in clinic.

Solihull Hospital: Landline 0121 424 5306 or 0121 424 9647

Queen Elizabeth Hospital: Mobile number is 07771940368 and Landline 0121 371 4499

We would like to encourage patients to sign up to '**myhealth**' which allows patients in long-term care to remotely access much of their clinical information held at the hospital, including their letters and laboratory results. If you would like to register or see further information, please go to health@QEHBwebsite

Breast Cancer Now are providing on line health and well-being sessions called 'moving forward' on line and Macmillan also have an online forum.

Breast Cancer Now and Macmillan have a wealth of patient information which is available online and in booklet form.