



Thursday 18 May 2017

Information for regulators and stakeholders regarding neonatal services at The Countess of Chester Hospital

This briefing is to provide you with advance information regarding an updated position on our ongoing review of neonatal services and the involvement of Cheshire Police at our request. At 10.30am today (Thursday) the information outlined below will be published by each respective organisation.

While we anticipate media interest due to this now being a police led investigation, we will be limited in what we can say and comment on further publically.

- Media enquiries about the investigation will be handled by Cheshire Police press desk on 01606 365 942.
- Media enquiries specific to the impact of this on operational hospital services and patient care will be handled by The Countess of Chester on 01 [redacted] I&S or by emailing [countess.feedback@\[redacted\] I&S](mailto:countess.feedback@[redacted] I&S)

Updated position on neonatal services and its ongoing review

The Countess of Chester Hospital has requested the input of Cheshire Police into its ongoing review of neonatal services.

In February this year we published the findings from an independent, clinical review into neonatal services at the Countess carried out by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. This report pointed to 24 recommendations for improvement which are now underway. It included a further detailed case note review by an independent neonatologist that has been unable to answer all of the questions regarding the cause of death for a number of babies.

The Trust and its doctors have continuing concerns about the unexplained deaths and are very keen to understand that everything possible has been done to help determine what has happened in our neonatal unit between June 2015 and June 2016.

As a hospital we have taken the clinical review as far as we can. We have now asked for the input of Cheshire Police to seek assurances that enable us to rule out unnatural causes of death.

Countess of Chester Hospital Medical Director Ian Harvey said: "We are deeply sorry for the further distress and heartache this will cause. Throughout this we have never lost sight of the families left bereaved by the loss of their baby, and they will continue to be our main concern.

At every point where the hospital has been able to share information with families and the public, we have done so. Approaching the police is not something we have undertaken lightly. This is to ensure we have been completely thorough in understanding what has happened here and to get the answers we and the families so desperately want."

Specially trained officers from Cheshire Police have been in contact with those families directly affected, and we will continue to provide our support where it is appropriate.

Our focus at this time is on supporting our staff, and those patients receiving care at the hospital.

Additional information about neonatal services and what this means

- Up until the point a baby is born it is looked after under the care of a maternity and obstetrics team. If a baby is poorly when it is born and needs to go to a neonatal unit, their care will transfer to doctors and nurses on a neonatal team. A neonatal unit specialises in the care of babies born early with low weight or a medical condition that requires specialised treatment. The Countess is now equivalent to a Level 1 Special Care Baby Unit. To understand the different levels of care visit www.bliss.org.uk/different-levels-of-care
- The Countess neonatal unit will remain open to women over 32 weeks in their pregnancy. We are confident the unit is safe to continue in its current form.
- We will be working with staff to ensure that expectant Mums and those individuals currently on the unit are provided with the necessary assurances to allow us to continue to care for them here at The Countess.
- Any Mums-to-be who have any queries about their pregnancy and what this means for them, can request an antenatal appointment via their community midwife.

Information from Cheshire Police regarding their investigation

In May 2017, The Countess of Chester Hospital Foundation Trust contacted Cheshire Constabulary regarding neonatal services at the hospital. This was in relation to a greater number of baby deaths and collapses than expected during the period June 2015 and June 2016.

The hospital also made the Constabulary aware of a number of independent reviews that they had commissioned into these deaths.

As a result, Cheshire Constabulary has launched an investigation, which will focus on the deaths of eight babies that occurred between that period where medical practitioners have expressed concern.

In addition the investigation will also conduct a review of a further seven baby deaths and six non-fatal collapses during the same period.

“We recognise that this investigation will have a significant impact on all of the families involved, staff and patients at the hospital and the public. Parents of the babies are being updated on the investigation and will be supported throughout the process by specially trained officers. We are committed to carrying out the investigation as quickly as possible.

The investigation is in its very early stages. We are unable to provide any further details at this time.”

Additional information:

- Please note that the term ‘collapse’ relates to: A medical collapse is when the patient's breathing and/or heart rate suddenly deteriorates to the point where they are at risk of dying unless doctors or other health professionals take action.
- Of the 15 baby deaths, 13 of these were at the Countess of Chester Hospital. The other 2 babies collapsed at the Countess of Chester Hospital and were transferred to other hospitals where they subsequently died.