

North Devon District Hospital
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Dear stakeholder

Service pressures at Bideford and Ilfracombe Minor Injury Units (MIUs)

Over the last few years we have tried to ensure that all of our stakeholders are aware of the service pressures that we are experiencing. We do this to ensure that you have an early heads up on issues that are affecting your local NHS services but also so we can have a conversation with the local community about whether we could address some of these challenges by working together more closely.

To this end, I am writing today to give you advance notice that the Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust is experiencing some staff shortages in our Minor Injury Units in Bideford and Ilfracombe which are requiring us to regularly reduce the opening hours at short notice. There is a significant amount of work underway to explore how we can increase the resilience of these services.

You will be aware that there is a national nursing shortage, and like all other NHS organisations, this often means that we operate some services like our MIUs with a high vacancy rate.

Our MIUs operate with very few staff and services which rely on a very small pool of nurses are not very resilient. One retirement or resignation can significantly affect the opening hours of the service. It can also have a knock-on effect on our A&E in Barnstaple (NDDH) as we have to pull staff out to the MIUs in order to keep them open.

We know it is not ideal to continually change the opening times of the MIUs because it means our patients are not clear when they can access the service. However we have to balance what we can safely provide with maintaining a 24/7 A&E service in Barnstaple.

We also know that local communities really value having access to a local minor injury service and we are in discussions with our commissioners, NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, to explore our options should the staffing pressures continue.

To ensure we share with you the same information that we are looking at, I have enclosed some basic background information on the MIU services in North Devon overleaf.

This is an extremely difficult position for us to be in but I am writing now, before any plans have been developed to ensure you are all aware of the situation we are in and to express my commitment to sharing any plans with you as soon as we possibly can.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me on Alison.diamond1@nhs.net if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely



Alison Diamond
Chief Executive
Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust

Information relating to Bideford and Ilfracombe Minor Injury Units

Number of attendances

Bideford MIU had 8,457 attendances last year, Ilfracombe had 4,595 attendances.

Type of presenting injuries

People attend MIUs for a range of problems including:

- Cuts, grazes and wounds
- Sprains, strains, muscle or joint injury
- Broken bones (fractures)
- Skin complaints – bites or stings, unexplained rash or even severe sunburn
- Minor infections
- Minor head injuries
- Emergency contraception
- Eye problems, such as minor eye infections, scratches etc.

Both MIUs see a significant number of attendances for dressing changes.

Disruption to service over recent months

The opening hours at both MIUs vary at short notice as there is no staff resilience to accommodate unplanned absence.

Workforce stats and vacancies

Bideford

Bideford MIU should have 3.55 whole time equivalent (WTE) Emergency Nurse Practitioners (ENP). This provides a service from 07:30 to 21:15 7 days per week.

Currently the unit is staffed to 3.5 WTE however, one part time ENP is on secondment from the Emergency Department at North Devon District Hospital, which means this post at NDDH has to be backfilled using agency staff. The post has been advertised twice with no suitable applicants.

Another full time ENP handed in her notice in November and there is currently no replacement.

Ilfracombe

Ilfracombe MIU should have 2.23 WTE ENPs to provide a service between 08:00 and 18:00 7 days per week.

The unit is currently staffed to 2.23 WTEs, however there is one part time nurse currently on maternity and this is being covered by one part time ENP from the Emergency Department at NDDH, which means this post at NDDH has to be backfilled using agency staff.

NDDH

The ED at NDDH currently has 3.03 WTE unfilled posts. 0.77 of these are being used to cover the MIUs.

11 hours per week of senior nurse support for the MIUs is provided by a band 7 nursing sister whose hours are also taken from the ED at NDDH.