

The safe and sustainable review of children's heart surgery in England and Wales

Briefing paper for Southampton City Health Scrutiny Panel

Monday 7th March 2011

The *safe and sustainable* review of children's heart surgery centres began nearly two years ago based on the premise that there should be fewer, larger centres for this kind of surgery in England.

Our patients and their families, who come from a large part of southern England, were reassured in the early stages of the review that the highest quality services would be supported to develop as the centres for children's heart surgery in the future.

The present situation is that the review has only included Southampton in one of the four options being proposed for the future surgical centres. The review does recognise that the option featuring Southampton, Option B, places greatest emphasis on the quality of service provided. However, the highest scoring option being presented expands the centre in Leicester with Southampton closing.

There are a number of important reasons why the NHS must make the children's heart surgery service in Southampton part of its future.

Outstanding quality of care

Professor Sir Ian Kennedy's independent review of the quality of care provided in the 11 centres in England showed that Southampton is the second best centre in the country. It scored more highly than Great Ormond Street Hospital in London and the Alder Hey Hospital in Liverpool, both of which have been given a safe future.

All the specialists in one hospital

In Southampton, all the care a patient with congenital heart disease could need at any stage of their life is available in one hospital. The co-location of the full range of specialised services for children and adults is recognised around the world as a gold standard and it has driven the very high standards of care offered in Southampton.

A history and culture of excellence and innovation

There is a long history of excellence in children's heart surgery in Southampton which began in the 1970s when pioneering surgeons first began to operate on tiny infants. The culture of excellence that is the hallmark of this service has grown over many years and today some of the best doctors from around the world apply to work in Southampton. This culture will not be created overnight in a different centre according to a set of instructions and therefore children from this area will be expected to travel further for a poorer standard of care.

Serving a large catchment

Since Southampton took Oxford's surgical cases and interventions the service has grown to four appointed surgeons and is approaching 360 cases per year. This puts Southampton within easy reach of the requirements of the review with a catchment that covers 5 million people in Surrey, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and the Channel Islands.

Access to specialised medical care for the sickest children in the South of England

If Southampton is not expanded as one of the future children's heart surgery centres it will lose its interventional catheter procedures and approximately half of its paediatric intensive care unit (PICU) will close. The PICU in Southampton is also one of the top two units in the country with a mortality significantly below expected. The consequences across the hospital of a reduced PICU would have a significant impact on the access that the sickest children in the South of England would have to urgent specialised medical treatment.