

Operational pressures affecting Ford Ward, Fordingbridge Hospital

September 2023

Due to ongoing and significant workforce pressures, and despite extensive efforts, the Trust has been unable to sustainably maintain safe staffing levels at Ford Ward and the ward has been paused to admissions in the interests of patient safety.

Ford Ward is a recovery and rehabilitation ward for people who have had a stay in an acute hospital for an injury or illness. It comprises 15 beds although it had been running at a capacity of 8 beds since March 2023 due to staffing challenges.

Supporting patients during this time

Patient and staff safety is our primary concern. At the time of the pause to admissions 21/08/23, six patients remained on the ward. Since then, all patients have returned home having finished their inpatient rehabilitation with ongoing support from community services.

Patients requiring rehabilitation inpatient support, that would normally be admitted to Ford Ward, are being supported at Lymington Hospital and Romsey Hospital. There is adequate capacity at these sites and the Trust anticipates no disruption to patient care. The Trust also operates a 'virtual ward' model with 58 'community beds' to enhance the support provided to people in their own homes.

While Ford Ward is paused to admissions, and as all patients have now been discharged, remaining staff at the ward have been redeployed to other teams and services. This includes the Avon Valley community care team (also based at Fordingbridge Hospital) as well as wards at other local community hospitals.

Efforts to recruit

The ward is in a relatively isolated, rural location, with limited affordable accommodation options for keyworkers. Combined with staffing pressures facing NHS services generally, this has driven the acute workforce challenges experienced at the site. Filling nursing shifts has been particularly difficult. The ward requires 10 whole-time equivalent nurses to safely cover 15 beds across all three shifts in a day. As at the end of August 2023, just 2.6 whole time equivalent nurses were in post. Whilst the Trust has been using agency staff to offset this gap, this is not a sustainable position in terms of care quality or effective use of resources.

Staffing challenges have placed significant additional pressure on remaining staff, with associated risks of sickness, stress and other impacts on staff wellbeing.

In recent months the Trust has explored all avenues for staffing. This includes:

- Long term agency placements
- Offering secondments and redeployment from other services
- Overtime payments
- Recruitment drives

The Trust also continues to recruit nurses from other countries to bolster the workforce. However these international colleagues have been unable to be deployed to Ford Ward due to insufficient staffing to provide adequate supervision, and insufficient local housing options for accommodation.

Communication

Operationally, the Trust has informed other local NHS Trusts, including Salisbury, Bournemouth and Southampton acute Trusts. Local primary care services (GP practices) are also aware. Alternative arrangements are in place with provider partners to support hospital discharge and ongoing care, with minimal disruption. The decision to pause to admissions was supported by the Integrated Care Board. The Trust continues to update and work closely with all partners.

Next steps

Given the scale of the challenge, and limited success despite best efforts to improve the staffing position, Ford Ward is likely to remain paused to admissions for the foreseeable future. Alternative arrangements currently in place will ensure patients requiring the type of care provided by Ford Ward will continue to receive it without any additional delay or disruption.

The Trust is now considering longer term proposals to ensure viable and sustainable inpatient recovery and rehabilitation services remain available to the local population and in support of local acute hospital partners. Communication and engagement with stakeholders will be central to developing any future proposal.