



Case Study

Community Support

Tetbury Hospital Trust case study

Tetbury Hospital Trust is a small, independent community hospital supported by its local community. In March 2020, Tetbury Hospital began to organise their personnel and services to ensure best possible support to the health of the local community, the wellbeing of their staff and volunteer communities, and the wider health economy across Gloucestershire and Wiltshire during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Context

As the pandemic hit, there was careful consideration as to what services Tetbury Hospital could continue to offer to the local community, in the light of the decision to stop all elective services. Even before elective services were halted, attendance to appointments were dropping, and there was a concern that delay to diagnoses and procedures would negatively impact the health of the local community as well as impact the finances of the hospital. In addition, there were furloughed staff and equipment that wasn't being used at Tetbury that could be useful in other health settings.



What we did

There were several changes that Tetbury Hospital recognised they could make in order to provide support to three levels of community:

LOCAL COMMUNITY:

- During the uncertain fortnight before lockdown was announced, a decision was taken to stop all elective services. Theatres closed, as did the Outpatient Department. However, Tetbury Hospital did what it could to continue to provide as much care as possible to the local community, in a covid-safe manner. It was clear that General Practice and the large Acute hospitals were becoming overwhelmed, and that people who required assistance for non-Covid related healthcare issues were either choosing to stay away or were finding it difficult to access services. For that reason, the decision was made to keep the Minor injury and X-ray clinics open throughout the pandemic.



Case Study

Community Support



- The Minor Injury service moved to a separate part of the building which had its own entrance and enabled social distancing while patients were waiting and being observed. The area was previously used by another Trust who delivered physiotherapy from the hospital. The area was given back to the hospital as they too changed the way they delivered their service during the pandemic.
- Keeping Minor Injury and X-ray open meant there was always access to healthcare and an open door at Tetbury Hospital, and patients started to come from further afield.
- Patients on the Hospitals waiting lists were not forgotten, phone consultations were introduced which helped to increase the number of outpatient consultations that could happen. Patients were given advice, sent prescriptions for medications, and when required listed for surgery, so when the Day Surgery Unit reopened their operation could be booked.
- The ophthalmology department continued to provide care, performing a notes review and prioritising patients whose condition would deteriorate most if left untreated. Inviting those patients in who require an urgent assessment, changing the pathway and booking system to avoid time spent in waiting rooms.
- The hospital even managed to open a new service during lockdown – they now have an echocardiogram service to complement their cardiology outpatient service. Patients previously had to go to the acute hospitals but now Tetbury is commissioned to offer it locally – a lasting benefit to the local community.



TRUST STAFF AND VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY:

- Staff wellbeing was central and so a dedicated counsellor, previously available only to staff face-to-face, was made available by phone to all staff.
- The upheaval around working and furlough was difficult for all workforces, and flexibility was key to Tetbury supporting its staff community. Staff had the choice of being seconded, going on furlough or staying in the hospital to deliver care. The closing of services was particularly challenging for zero-hour contract staff so the hospital helped them in finding other opportunities. Some administrative staff were able to remain in role, and a new VoIP phone system, which had only been installed months before lockdown, allowed people to work from home, with no change to the hospital telephone numbers.
- The CEO sent out regular team briefings to keep all staff informed and feeling part of the community. It was decided to include everyone – including those on furlough. It is thought that keeping everyone involved and up-to-date about changes contributed to the high return rate of staff as they knew what had happened.



Case Study

Community Support



- As well as the staff, Tetbury's hospital community includes a strong cohort of volunteers. Many of whom were over 70 and so they were asked to stay at home to protect themselves. When they returned in January 2021, planning was in place to enable them to work safely.

THE WIDER HEALTH AND CARE COMMUNITY:

- While supporting the patient population, and the hospital community, Tetbury was also able to support the wider health system across Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.
- As the hospital was in a position to be flexible with its workforce, they seconded staff to work across the NHS within theatre and on the acute wards – on the front line. The hospital was also able to support other hospitals in the local health ecosystem by sending PPE that they didn't need since their theatres were now closed. They loaned their ventilators to the local acute NHS hospital under a formal loan agreement. They also offered the hospital site for use in its entirety but it wasn't suitable for overnight stays and lacked catering facilities, so it wasn't a feasible option. But they provided other support where it was needed.

“ We worked really hard to help as much as we could within the county and within Wiltshire. It was hugely rewarding, but quite a traumatic time trying to manage it all.

ZENA DALTON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, TETBURY HOSPITAL TRUST



Outcomes

- **Beneficial changes for patients** such as the smoother ophthalmology pathway and the new Cardiac Echo service are benefiting the local patient community and the changes are therefore staying in place.
- **More awareness of the hospital among the local community**, and wider afield: Having kept an open door, Tetbury was valued for being small, local and accessible and so this has enhanced awareness of the hospital among the community. The Minor Injury Unit has now become a Minor Injury and Illness Unit, thereby offering more services to the community.
- **The care and flexibility shown to the staff and volunteer community** has supported really high re-uptake of jobs once everyone was able to return to work.
- **Stronger Relationships with partners** – Providing essential support during the crisis and now with recovery, has really benefitted working relationships which will have a lasting impact.





Learning

If the same thing happened again, the CEO reflects that she would include volunteers in the briefings and communication that kept staff informed as there was very little contact with them until January 2021.

Where we are now

Staff and equipment have now been returned to Tetbury and the hospital continues to support their NHS partners by offering operating capacity in order to assist the NHS in recovering its elective care waiting times, and to support the local patient community with excellent care provided by a motivated and valued workforce of staff and volunteers

“ Picking up the phone to operational and middle management staff in the two local acute hospitals helped us to offer vital support in a timely fashion, so our resources were not wasted and were directed to those who needed them.



Contact



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