

BRIEFING NOTE

For Elected Representatives

Proposed Changes to GP Out of Hours Service

Proposed future of GP Out of Hours provision in Belfast Trust area

Did you know, Belfast Trust is currently consulting on changes in provision of its GP Out of Hours Service (GP OOH)

The consultation began on 3 October 2024 and runs for 13 weeks until 2nd January 2025.

We are committed to providing a safe, effective and compassionate service for the greater Belfast area and are therefore proposing to amalgamate provision for Primary Care Out of Hours service for Belfast onto one site.

This is in line with strategic regional direction as set out by the Department of Health's *Systems, Not Structures* report in 2016 and later, in their *No More Silos* review in 2020, which focussed on a sustainable, integrated urgent and emergency care model.

The amalgamation will help to consolidate and optimise utilisation of the available resources and to deliver a value for money service which is responsive and equitable for your constituents.



In 2023/24, 83% of engagement with GP Out of Hours was by telephone

GP Out of Hours service overview

The GP Out of Hours service is for people who need urgent medical treatment but can't wait until their doctor's practice opens.

It is defined as "care provided between 6:00pm and 8:00am on weekdays, all weekend and Bank Holidays".

Unlike independent GP practices, Belfast Trust is responsible for managing and delivering GP Out of Hours (OOH) service through contractual arrangements with GPs, who have signed up to provide their services out of hours.

Care provided in the OOH period is unscheduled, i.e. there has been no forward planning (either by patient or professional) or appointment made in advance.



Info. Sessions

As part of the consultation, two information events will be held to share the proposed changes. Please click [here](#) or scan below to register your interest to attend.



Background

We currently have two bases for GP OOH, one located at Knockbreda Health and Wellbeing Centre and the other on the Crumlin Road, opposite the Mater Hospital. The current GP OOH model on two sites has been adopted from legacy Trust arrangements, when Beldoc GP OOH on the Crumlin Road provided the service for the population of north and west Belfast and Sebdoc provided the service out of hours for the population of south and east Belfast. When Belfast Trust was established from the amalgamation of 6 legacy Trusts in 2007, the Trust maintained the existing arrangements for GP OOH for the whole population of Belfast Trust.

Both sites offer a telephone prioritisation service with either telephone assessment, treatment or advice from a GP, a home or base visit or a referral into an Emergency Department, Urgent Care Centre or other multi-disciplinary service, a mental health assessment, or confirmation of end of life or working with community district nurses and patients in nursing homes.

Over 2023/24, across both our OOH bases, there were:

- 📞 86,262 Advice calls
- 📍 15,591 Base visits
- 🏠 1150 Home visits

In total, that's over 103,003 calls and visits.

On the basis of this information, it shows that more than 83% of engagement with GP OOH is advice provided over the telephone, with 15% of patients having to visit either base and just over 1% assessed as needing a home visit. (This trend continues throughout 2024).

Given the small proportion of people visiting a base, the Trust is proposing to consolidate the two urgent care services onto one site, which will be a more efficient use of public monies.

Proposal for Change

We are consulting on the modernisation of the GP OOH service. This is required to deliver the GP OOH service and also overcome the current challenges faced. The proposal is to:

- Introduce a multi-disciplinary service with nurses, paramedics and pharmacists - so that the service is no longer reliant on one single profession and to free up GPs to attend to those who are more acutely unwell.
- Provide GP OOH from one base for a more cost-effective and efficient service to align to the relatively newly established Phone First service. Moving to one site with the newly introduced skill mix would make considerable economies of scale by consolidating resources to address the significant, increasing overspend that the service is facing year on year, with a projected overspend for current the model for 2024/2025 at £1million.

Due to a myriad of complex factors, the Trust has struggled to populate the OOH rota over recent years and securing adequate GP OOH cover becomes particularly challenging during holiday periods.



Engagement

The Trust has undertaken engagement with a range of stakeholders to set out proposals to modernise the service and address the challenges that it faces. At our engagement events, the rationale for change was presented and proposed options. Based on the quantitative and qualitative information gathered, there was broad consensus about the rationale to move to a one site model to consolidate the two current sites on the Crumlin Road site. It is the preferred option as:

- It will deliver equity to all Belfast patients with the richness of a multi-disciplinary skill mix on one site
- It offers dedicated physical capacity to accommodate both the newly established Primary Care Out of Hours (no longer just GP OOH) along with Phone First
- It is located in close proximity to the Emergency Department at the Mater Hospital; and
- It will improve safety and ensure sustainability of the services going forward

The current service is being reconfigured onto one site from the two site model. Co-location of the service on the Crumlin Road. The Trust has been made aware of some concerns that the Knockbreda Health and Wellbeing Centre is closing. This is not the case and it should be noted that no service is closing – the current service is being reconfigured onto one site from the two site model. Co-location of the service on the Crumlin Road will not have any impact on the other services provided at the Knockbreda Centre.

In essence, it is within this context, that the Trust needs to establish a sustainable, resilient primary care workforce for the future to provide an equitable and efficient out of hours of service, and to ensure that the patient has access to the right person at the right time in the right place.

Consultation – Have Your Say!

The Trust is currently consulting on the proposed model. The consultation report which sets out the background and proposed options, is available at: [Consultations | Belfast Health & Social Care Trust website \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net/consultations).

The consultation will run for 13 weeks and close on Thursday 2 January 2025.

We are inviting people to have their say by attending an information session. Please register to attend by scanning the QR code.



Thursday 28 November 2024



Thursday 5 December 2024



2:00pm-3.30pm



7:00pm-8.30pm



Olympia Leisure Centre,
Boucher Road



Knockbracken Hall,
Knockbracken Healthcare Park

You can also have your say by completing the consultation questionnaire by 2nd January at [Consultation on the proposed future of GP Out of Hours provision in Belfast Trust area - NI Direct - Citizen Space](#)

