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SOUTH EASTERN SYDNEY LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT, SYDNEY CHILDREN'S HOSPITALS NETWORK AND NORFOLK ISLAND HOSPITAL FINALISE DISCUSSIONS FOR URGENT AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TRANSFERS

In what is a first for Australia, an arrangement between South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD), Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) and Norfolk Island Hospital (NIH) has been agreed on today to facilitate urgent and emergency medical transfers from Norfolk Island to the Australian mainland.

Each year, approximately 50 patients from NIH require transfer to the Australian mainland for urgent or semi-urgent treatment - which has become an emerging priority for NIH.

Through these discussions, direct pathways have been developed between SESLHD and NIH to facilitate access to beds and hospital care in medical emergency situations for adults, children, pregnant women and mental health patients.

Agreed by the Chief Executive, SESLHD, Mr Terry Clout, Chief Executive, SCHN (Randwick and Westmead), Ms Elizabeth Koff and Director of the Norfolk Island Hospital, Mr David McCowan, and in the presence of the Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, AC, CVO, the agreement will provide NIH with one point of contact through direct access to SESLHD clinicians and facilities, and enable NIH to send acutely ill patients to NSW for treatment more efficiently.

Previously, some patients from NIH have been flown to NSW for assessment and treatment, however under the new arrangements; patients will now be assessed by specialists at SESLHD via telehealth video conferencing facilities and may also be transferred to SESLHD facilities, and SCHN facilities for paediatric cases, if required.

Mr Terry Clout, Chief Executive, SESLHD, said one of the major outcomes would be timely and smooth access to advice and support for patients at NIH, removing as many barriers as possible to obtaining clinical advice, and likewise removing barriers to arranging acute admissions.

"Receiving urgent clinical advice or arranging an urgent medical admission is important for both the patient and treating clinician.

"I am pleased to have finalised these discussions, which will now improve the capacity to manage problems without patients having to leave Norfolk Island, and also improve the capacity to determine which patients should be admitted to a SESLHD facility," Mr Clout said.

SESLHD will also act as a facilitator for NIH accessing services and beds in other NSW hospitals, providing clinical staff at NIH with one point of contact.

Mr McCowan, Chief Executive NIH, described these arrangements as a huge coup for NIH, providing greater, direct and reliable access to expert clinical advice and support.

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District
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“Direct access to clinical staff at SESLHD will mean our clinical staff no longer need to contact NSW hospitals on an ad-hoc basis seeking access to hospital beds for urgent medical transfers.

“Our clinical staff will be able to see and discuss clinical issues quickly with clinical staff at SESLHD, which will improve patient care as patients will be able to be seen by a SESLHD specialist on the Island without having to be referred off Island – thus avoiding delays to patients and expense to NIH,” Mr McCowan said.

Due to the limited mental health facilities on Norfolk Island, mental health patients are also set to benefit through access to acute mental health facilities and expertise at SESLHD.

Dr Murray Wright, Director of Mental Health, SESLHD, said NIH staff working with patients experiencing mental health problems will be able to access expert practice and pharmaceutical advice and support through telephone or video-link contact with staff in mental health facilities throughout SESLHD.

“This expert advice and support is likely to help mental health patients receive treatment at the NIH and/or within their own community by local clinicians.

“It is also very likely that fewer mental health patients will need transfer to SESLHD or facilities on the Australian mainland as a result of the improved access to expert mental health advice and support,” Dr Wright said.

Other assistance to NIH in development are access to SESLHD’s Medical Imaging Services for the reading and reporting of X-Rays, and SESLHD’s Pharmacy Services for the provision of pharmaceutical support, including the ability to exchange costly expiring drugs, access to pharmaceutical and medical equipment and supplies.

Mr David McCowan said in addition to access to SESLHD’s clinical support staff, NIH will have access to educational opportunities, assistance with recruitment and locum services - all of which have been difficult to find previously.

“We look forward to a long and mutually beneficial partnership with the South East Sydney Local Health District,” Mr McCowan said.

A territory of Australia, Norfolk Island has a population of over 1,500, with NIH as its only public hospital. NIH is a 24-bed facility, with an additional six aged care community low-level ‘hostel’ beds on site.

The new arrangements bring an end to discussions between the Administrator of Norfolk Island, the Hon Owen Walsh, Mr David McCowan and Terry Clout, SESLHD chief executive on the difficulties NIH has experienced in: obtaining a hospital bed in NSW in an emergency situation, access to expertise and advice on medical matters and the costs to access to services and resources.

Due to its proximity to the airport and availability of services of the Randwick Hospitals Campus – which includes Prince of Wales Hospital, Royal Hospital for Women and Sydney Children’s Hospital – and St George Hospital which is a trauma centre for SESLHD, it was determined SESLHD would be the most suitable Local Health District in NSW to assist NIH.

SESLHD was approached by NSW Health to work collaboratively with NIH to build relationships and assist NIH to enhance their current services by providing referral pathways, disaster response, community and preventative health, workforce development, procurement and access to expertise and advice.

Interviews available with Dr Michael McGlynn, Medical Executive Director, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District and Staff Specialist, Sydney Children’s Hospital.