

Loss of Liver and Pancreas Surgery at University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire

I have found out that the liver and pancreas service including major surgery at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire (UHCW) is being threatened with closure by commissioners (unelected NHS bureaucrats based in Birmingham), unless it submits itself to a takeover by University Hospital Birmingham (UHB), with plans to downgrade its specialism and utilise it as a subsidiary. UHB will relocate all complex treatments and operations to Birmingham.

I understand that all centres treating major liver and pancreas conditions are expected to fulfil certain national guidelines including an overall catchment population of circa 2 million. UHCW supports the patients of Coventry and Warwickshire, as well as City and Sandwell NHS Trust, and has recently signed an agreement with Worcester/Redditch and Hereford to provide a similar service thus fulfilling the population requirement. It is expected that the alliance with Worcester shall take some time to mature, and for the clinical pathways for patients to be firmly established.

As a patient who has benefited from this service 5 years ago I was horrified to learn of the imminent closure of this valuable service, as the staff struggle to maintain their high standards against considerable odds. Even though several liver and pancreas centres DO NOT fulfil the 2 million population requirement, UHCW is the only one targeted with closure.

The Hospital team is the only one in the Midlands and the 2nd in the UK to offer robotic liver and pancreas cancer surgery. In addition to this, the affiliated Neuroendocrine team was awarded the European Centre of Excellence status, one of only 42 centres in Europe.

All of this specialism with the key team that supports this will be lost to us if we do not fight for its survival, Birmingham does not have the capacity to support what is being lost so the end result will be longer waiting lists, further travel time for patients to Birmingham and the loss of key skills all of which will be a loss to Coventry.

This is not a way of saving money at UHCW as the unit is self-funding, nor is it a case of improving efficiency or outcomes for patients but rather a way of UHB making more money and doing what they seem to do best, take everything that suits its purpose. If we do not question the rationale behind this it could be the thin end of the wedge with more services being taken away in the future from our excellent Hospital.

I urge you to support the saving of this service and question the reason for such a strange decision especially as Coventry is on the up, why would we not want to have one of the best hospitals in the country.