

## Letter to Halstead Gazette from Halstead Hospital League of Friends 14/12/2021

It is almost one whole year since the ward block at Halstead Hospital closed and the ward has remained empty and silent since. The Covid pandemic was the initial cause when all facilities were transferred to Braintree Community Hospital back in March 2020. There was a brief return last year.

PROVIDE, the company employed by mid Essex CCG to look after community services and hence Halstead Hospital, decided last March to set up a 'virtual ward' in the community as a trial. This meant that instead of spending some weeks in Halstead Hospital patients, usually elderly and with complex medical problems, were sent straight home from the secondary care hospital. The staff that would have looked after them in Halstead Hospital were offered jobs visiting and caring for these patients at home. Most of the patients live in the Chelmsford/Maldon direction so it has meant a lot of travelling to and from Halstead for the staff. Consequently, a lot of the staff resigned or retired and those that did take up the offer have found it arduous and challenging. From the feedback the League of Friends has had there are mixed opinions. PROVIDE has told us the virtual ward has been a success while other feedback has been less positive. Certainly it appears the stress and demand on secondary care beds has worsened and they are crying out for reopening community hospital beds like Halstead as the 'virtual ward' does not work for all patients.

The role of Halstead Hospital Ward now is very uncertain for the future.

There are several possible outcomes

- It could return to being an intermediate community care hospital.
- It could become a stroke unit for Mid and South Essex as there are excellent facilities for treating stroke patients in Halstead Hospital. However, there is already a stroke facility at St Peter's Hospital, Maldon and Halstead is a distance from Mid and South Essex.
- The third possibility is that the hospital could close .

It all now depends on the outcomes of ongoing reviews and discussions being held by the local Health Authorities. These meetings are published and open to the public.

PROVIDE have agreed to keep the League of Friends informed of when these meetings will be held and we have regular contact with senior managers in PROVIDE and the Mid Essex CCG. At our October AGM one of the PROVIDE directors attended and laid out the present situation and uncertainties. The good news is that the Rehabilitation Centre and Out Patients will continue unchanged. It is the ward block we are concerned about.

We wish to make the people of Halstead aware of the situation. It is thanks to the many donations and legacies we have received over the years that has allowed us to make Halstead Hospital such an excellent facility and it would be a travesty to lose it.

We, the Halstead Hospital League of Friends, have tried hard to keep positive dialogue with PROVIDE and mid Essex CCG. We will campaign hard to try and

keep these excellent facilities going which have been financed by the people of Halstead, owned by the League of Friends and lent free to the NHS. We do need all the support we can get from local people and dignitaries.

Please get involved and help save our hospital.

Thank you

Dr Alan Symington  
Chairman, Halstead Hospital League of Friends