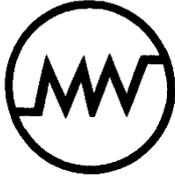


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9th November 2011**

Peter Dunt
Chairman
The Royal Surrey County Hospital Foundation Trust
Egerton Road
Guildford
GU2 7XX

Dear Mr Dunt

Proposed Merger between RSCH and Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals

Several members of the Witley and Milford PPG have attended meetings where this proposed merger was discussed. We have seen the information on the relevant websites, and discussed the matter at our own recent meeting. We hope that the following observations may be of interest. You will see that they relate mainly to the benefits that the proposed merger is intended to bring to patients.

General

Generally speaking, it is not immediately obvious that the claimed benefits, even assuming them to be desirable, would follow automatically from the merging of the two Trusts. In some cases greater co-operation between existing institutions might seem a more promising way forward. We notice that a Full Business Case has yet to be made, and we suspect that the devil may lie in the detail.

Wider range of specialist services locally instead of in London

It is hard to oppose this if it can be achieved without detriment to other services. We do believe, however, that a patient with a condition requiring an exceptional kind of expertise will be prepared to travel far to get it. Localism is not a great virtue in a case like this.

Increased 7-day working with consultant reviews every day for in-patients

It is not obvious how this would follow, unless the merger saved money which could then be spent on improved provision. The published proposals do not claim any financial benefits.

Improved access to cutting-edge treatments via local universities

Again, one hopes this might be done by existing hospitals. Even sharing the cost and usage of expensive equipment might surely be achieved by co-operation.

Maximising benefits of digital technology

No doubt desirable, but a merger is not the obvious way to achieve it. Indeed a merger might bring its own organisational problems, delaying attention to other matters.

Travel implications

Although reassurance has been given on this point, we do wish to emphasise that for the members of our group the implications for travel and access are a major consideration, at least for the more routine types of hospital treatment. This is especially important when the patient is a child and frequent visits by parents and other family are almost as important as the medical treatment. Our experience shows that the parking at St. Peter's Hospital is particularly bad, while the situation at Royal Surrey is a constant source of complaint. The merger might well have implications for local community bus services like the Hoppa. Whether a merger would require more travelling by doctors and consultants is not perhaps our immediate concern, but we do not wish to see expensive people spending too much time on the road.

Reduction of choice

Subject to these other considerations, we would wish to support the CMA in regretting any reduction in the choice available to patients.

Clinicians

Our members attach some weight to the fact that, on the evidence of meetings attended, many clinicians remain to be convinced of the benefits of the merger.

Yours sincerely

(Mrs) Julie Grist, Chairman,

cc

- Aileen McLeish, Chair, Ashford and St Peter's Hospital
- Phelim Brady, Guildford and Waverley CCG
- Nelson Jung, Director of Mergers Competition and Markets Authority