

Creating a pathology network for West Yorkshire and Harrogate

This joint briefing is to update you about the work taking place to develop a network approach to pathology services in West Yorkshire and Harrogate. Many of you may already be aware that discussions around this have been taking place, following NHS Improvement's directive that we should form a network for the region, and we thought it would be helpful to make sure everyone has an overview of what has been agreed so far and the next steps.

This work is being led through WYAAT (West Yorkshire Association of Acute Trusts*), the partnership between the six acute trusts across West Yorkshire and Harrogate who are working together to deliver more joined up, high quality and cost-effective care for patients.

We are conscious that there has already been a lot of change recently for local pathology teams, including the creation of a joint venture for Airedale and Bradford, consolidation of services across trusts' sites, and changes to how some specialist pathology services are provided.

We appreciate that this has meant some uncertainty and anxiety for staff and a key aim of forming a network is to provide greater stability for pathology services across the region and put us all in a stronger position going forward.

Establishing a network will help us to address the challenges that pathology is currently facing, such as staffing rotas and upgrading equipment, and invest in developing services and staff to improve services for patients. This will mean building on the informal collaboration already in place and working together to provide services, rather than as individual trusts. We will need to agree the best model for delivering services, which is likely to mean concentrating some testing into 'hubs', although each trust will retain onsite the testing necessary to support acute care and sufficient volume to deliver an efficient and productive service.

Some initial work has been done to map out possible approaches but no decisions have been made about how many hubs there should be or where they should be located, and we have agreed to look at the best solution for each pathology discipline, rather than one overall model. The WYAAT Committee in Common (which comprises the chief executives and chairs from each trust) has agreed that recommendations for preferred models for each discipline will be brought back to the Committee once further work and discussions with staff have taken place.

We have included some Q&As below to explain things in a bit more detail and we are setting up meetings to discuss this further and enable you to ask any initial questions you may have. We will also be organising some region-wide workshops to look at potential service models and their pros and cons and we hope you or a representative from your team will be able to attend one of these and give us your views.

In the meantime, if you have any questions please raise these with your laboratory manager or email to wyaatpathology@nhs.net. We will be collecting questions and sharing responses with all teams as part of the regular updates planned.

Best wishes

Martin Barkley, Chief Executive, MYHT and CE lead for the WYAAT pathology programme

Brendan Brown, Chief Executive, ANHSFT,

Clive Kay, Chief Executive, BTHFT

Owen Williams, Chief Executive, CHFT

Dr Ros Tolcher, Chief Executive, HDFT

Dr Yvette Oade, Acting Chief Executive, LTHT

*Further information about WYAAT is available at www.wyaat.wyhpартnership.co.uk

Q&As

Why do we need to change?

Nationally, all trusts are expected to form pathology networks with neighbouring trusts, in line with the recommendations in the Carter Report on NHS productivity and efficiency. This is being overseen by NHS Improvement, who requires us to submit our plans for this approach in July this year.

In West Yorkshire and Harrogate, we were already looking at how we could work together and potential approaches for collaborative working. We recognise the importance of improving efficiency, as required by NHSI; however, there are a number of other reasons that we want to do this.

Firstly, like other parts of the country, we are concerned about the shortages of staff in some specialties, for example consultant microbiologists and haematology/blood transfusion biomedical scientists. Between us, we have a considerable number of vacancies, some of which we are having to use locums to cover. In addition, 15% of our pathology staff are over 55 and not enough new staff are being trained to replace them when they retire so we need to work together to find different ways to deliver the service. We want to make sure we can attract staff to work in West Yorkshire and Harrogate and also retain the skills and expertise of the staff we already have. Working as a network will enable us to explore opportunities to develop new roles and support staff to work across disciplines where appropriate, including working with local universities on training programmes and placements.

Helping to manage the demand for pathology tests is also a big factor, as this is becoming increasingly challenging. Demand in West Yorkshire and Harrogate is rising by around 3% per year and there are also pressures to reduce turnaround times to support patient flow and earlier cancer diagnosis. Working as a network will enable us to increase productivity and develop consistent, clinically agreed protocols for requesting tests, which will be more robust if done collectively. Similarly, standardising requests and reference ranges will help improve quality and safety for patients.

The other key driver is to enable investment in new technology, including upgrading laboratory information management systems. Updating aging equipment and taking advantage of new technology is essential if we are to maintain a high quality service for patients but the cost of this is an increasing issue for all trusts. Working as a network will not only allow us to share resources to greater effect but enable us to access funding for new technology, which would be difficult for trusts to get individually. For example, we have already put in a joint bid for funding for a new laboratory information management system which would be common to all trusts.

What do you mean by a network?

Essentially this is an arrangement for working together to provide services rather than working as individual trusts. We have already been doing this to some extent so want to build on this and make arrangements within pathology more formal to operate collectively across West Yorkshire and Harrogate.

We will need to agree the best configuration for delivering services, which is likely to mean bringing some services together into 'hubs', although each trust will retain onsite the testing necessary to support acute care and sufficient volume to deliver an efficient and productive service. Some initial work has been done to map out possible approaches and we will be sharing this with you to get your thoughts over the next few months.

Our network model could take a number of forms but it will need to accommodate the different legal regimes that operate for Foundation Trusts and NHS Trusts. It will also need to take into account the joint venture company which has been established by BTHFT and ANHSFT.

What will this mean for me and my role?

The detail has not been worked through yet: there will be a significant amount of work required to determine the best potential models for each pathology discipline and we want to involve all staff across the region in this process. We believe that a network will offer greater development opportunities for staff and make West Yorkshire and Harrogate a better place to work.

Any changes will be implemented gradually over the next few years and we will keep everyone up to date about progress to make sure you are clear about any changes there may be and what they would mean for you.

What has happened so far?

The initial focus was on developing relationships and collaboration between the trusts' pathology services. We then looked at some ways that we can work together more effectively to provide services, including immunology services, and – as mentioned above - have put together a joint bid for funding to introduce a common laboratory information management system across all trusts.

NHS Improvement originally wrote to us in 2017 proposing that we should develop a network for West Yorkshire and Harrogate based on a single hub. However, while we agreed that a network was the right approach for the region, we were not convinced that a single hub was the right approach and agreed that we would do more work to explore the best approach for our network.

Work has focused on the three main pathology disciplines: blood sciences, microbiology and cellular pathology. We have used an external company to collate service data from all the trusts and start mapping out some potential configurations.

A number of workshops have been held with laboratory managers and consultant clinical leads to look at some of this data and consider the opportunities, benefits, and risks of developing a network. The programme team has also visited the pathology collaboration in Gateshead and spoken to one of the trusts involved in the former Pathology Partnership in the East of England region to learn from their experiences.

The work done so far was presented to the WYAAT Committee in Common last month and it was agreed that recommendations for preferred models for each area will be brought back to the Committee in July once further work and discussions with staff have taken place.

How does the Bradford & Airedale Joint Venture fit into the network?

The Joint Venture is wholly owned by the respective trusts, who have both committed to working as part of a West Yorkshire and Harrogate network. As mentioned earlier, the network model will need to take the Joint Venture arrangements into account, along with the different legal regimes for foundation trusts and NHS trusts. We will also be able to benefit from the learning from establishing the Joint Venture and use this to help us develop a network approach.

What are the next steps?

As mentioned above, laboratory managers and consultants have been involved in the initial discussions held and we would now like to work with all pathology staff to develop the model for a West Yorkshire and Harrogate network. We are arranging a number of workshops across the region in March and April to discuss possible options and enable you to contribute your views and ideas. Laboratory managers will make sure as many staff as possible are released to attend these events and all staff will get the chance to comment on proposals.

There are a lot of other people who also need to be involved in developing our approach, including staff in other clinical departments, support services, GPs, and colleagues at the CCGs. We are also working with our HR teams to make sure any implications for staff are fully identified and will be working closely with our trade union colleagues throughout this process.

How do I raise any questions or concerns?

The programme team is arranging meetings for staff at each trust to discuss this further and enable you to ask any questions: dates for these will be sent out as soon as possible.

In the meantime, if you have any questions please speak to your laboratory manager or email wyaatpathology@nhs.net