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Maternity services important to people of Cumbria

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Maternity services important to people of Cumbria

Posted on Friday 20th December 2013

NHS Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has announced it fully intends to continue to commission a consultant led maternity service at Furness General Hospital (FGH) in Barrow-in-Furness for the foreseeable future as well as the West Cumberland Hospital at Whitehaven and Cumberland Infirmary in Carlisle.

The population of Cumbria totals approximately half a million people that are clustered in towns and villages which can be a long distance from each other. This means that there are a relatively small number of births in each of the natural communities throughout the whole county.

From a total of 220 maternity units in the UK, there are 43 small units and two of those units are in Cumbria. NHS Cumbria CCG has recognised this does leave some maternity services vulnerable in terms of sustainability but they are responding to the needs of the Cumbrian population and its geography by working in partnership with providers to continue to commission a consultant led maternity service countywide.

NHS Cumbria CCG is clear that it sees the retention of consultant led maternity services at Furness General Hospital as a core commissioning priority. FGH serves a population in excess of 100,000 and the commissioners and the University Hospitals Morecambe Bay NHS Trust (UHMB) came to the conclusion earlier this year that there was no acceptable model for acute care that did not continue to provide the services in Furness.

This decision leaves UHMB and the NHS Cumbria CCG with the challenge of how this can be provided which includes maternity recruitment and how to ensure staff at the small unit at FGH see a sufficiently large and complex mix of cases to meet clinical standards and how staff in a small unit keep up their skills. This will mean exploring network solutions with other providers and stakeholders to find new ways of working to sustain the service.

Dr Geoff Jolliffe, GP Lead for Furness, said: "We are working with our providers and asking them to be innovative and to explore new possibilities to give us a unique service response for the women of Cumbria. Due to our distinct geography it can sometimes be difficult to access services outside the county. However, all my colleagues and healthcare professionals across the county are committed to providing a high quality safe maternity service at all hospitals in Cumbria."

Dr David Rogers, GP Lead for Copeland, added: "Giving birth is a natural life event and maternity services are an essential local service. All Cumbrian residents will have access to a safe, accessible and sustainable service county wide. In order to provide this we may need a unique and innovative maternity service so that we can respond to the needs and expectations of the people of Cumbria."

Discussions are also planned to take place between NHS Cumbria CCG and Lancashire North Clinical Commissioning Group regarding access to maternity services at the Royal Lancaster Infirmary, as part of the ongoing work to ensure every possible option is looked into and investigated.

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