

Press Release

Code A

Embargoed until 1430hrs July 12th 2005

Board receives report on hip surgery

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority will today receive a report of an investigation into a small number of sub standard hip replacement operations carried out in Hampshire as part of a contract for orthopaedic surgery with an independent sector provider.

The investigation was commissioned by the Strategic Health Authority following reports of problems with hip replacement surgery performed by one particular surgeon working with 'Netcare UK', an established independent provider of surgical services to the NHS.

'Netcare UK' was contracted to perform 1000 orthopaedic operations by Portsmouth Hospitals Trust, acting as lead commissioner on behalf of hospitals in Portsmouth, Frimley Park and Plymouth between October 2003 and March 2004. This was necessary because orthopaedic teams in all three hospitals, made up of large numbers of armed forces reservists, were severely depleted when reservists were called up in preparation for the Gulf War.

Key findings of the report are:

- for the overwhelming majority of patients the contract between the NHS and 'Netcare UK' worked well. Six operations, out of a total of 1000 in the contract, were sub standard and were all performed by the same surgeon.
- Some shortfalls in recruitment, contract management, theatre scheduling and clinical governance were identified.
- Cultural differences which exist between overseas healthcare teams and those prevalent in the NHS must be recognised and addressed to avoid a negative effect on quality.

The six patients have been offered any treatment which becomes necessary in a hospital of their choice immediately any problems arise – in Hampshire or an NHS hospital or private facility of their choice, conveniently located for them. Some further revision operations have already been carried out. In making these arrangements, Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust has worked in partnership with 'Netcare UK.'

Swift action to safeguard other patients was taken by Portsmouth Hospitals Trust and 'Netcare UK' when problems came to light: the surgeon was suspended immediately and he returned to South Africa having worked for only two weeks; he was reported to both the General Medical Council and the Health Professions Council of South Africa and admitting privileges were withdrawn by Netcare for all Netcare hospitals in South Africa.

Dr Simon Tanner, Medical Director of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority, said: "Operations performed on these six people were clearly sub standard and not what we expect for NHS patients. The actions which followed discovery of the problems was swift by Portsmouth Hospitals Trust and 'Netcare UK' but the Strategic Health Authority needed to protect the interests of future patients and commissioned an investigation to find out exactly what went wrong and how to avoid any recurrence.

More

...2

“We do not believe there should be any loss of confidence in arrangements made with the independent sector to provide non urgent operations. While hip replacement surgery performed by this one surgeon may have been substandard, the majority of the work done as part of this contract was of the quality required.

“It should be remembered that this contract was entered into at a time when working relationships between the NHS and independent providers were less mature than today and without the benefit of recent guidance issued by the Department of Health. The report has helped the organisations concerned to understand how the NHS and independent sector can work together to provide surgical care for the residents of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.”

The Strategic Health Authority Board will consider and approve an action plan to ensure that recommendations of the report are acted upon and the SHA will work with Portsmouth Hospitals Trust and Netcare UK to drive this forward.

Recommendations of the report:

The recommendations can be summarised as follows:

1. Recruitment processes should mirror those held for consultant appointments within the NHS and interview panels should contain a surgeon from the relevant specialty.
2. When contracting with overseas teams arrangements should be made with the local “host” NHS facility to provide a consistent communication channel to resolve issues around clinical performance within the contract and to facilitate clinical governance. These may be combined through a single person.
3. Supporting arrangements for the selection of patients, theatre list management and scheduling and the provision of equipment must be clear and managed.
4. The contract must make clear who has responsibilities for what in relation to all staff involved and these must be clearly understood at the outset by all parties to the contract.
5. All staff working on the contract must understand their responsibilities for reporting concerns about quality of clinical care, and how these should be discharged.
6. Information about patient care should follow the patient irrespective of the care provider.

Ends

Contact: Strategic Health Authority Communications team: Code A
 Portsmouth Hospitals Trust Communications team: Code A
 ‘Netcare UK’: Ed Lotz, Medical Director Code A

Notes to Editors: General

- More information about the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority is available from www.hiow.nhs.uk