

7 February 2019

Delays to planned treatment

We are very sorry that some patients are experiencing delays in receiving routine treatment at West Herts Hospitals Trust (WHHT). The Trust usually treats patients within 18 weeks, as set out in the NHS constitution.

The current long waits for non-urgent planned surgery are partly the result of a national directive last winter which meant that some people had their surgery postponed so that hospitals could use their capacity to care for emergency patients.

WHHT is not the only hospital to be facing these difficulties; it is a problem that is being experienced in many other areas.

Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and WHHT are working hard to resolve the issues so patients can be seen and treated in a timely way. WHHT is exploring all avenues to ensure those patients who have waited the longest are treated soonest. This could be at WHHT, either during the week or at weekends, or at a local alternative, non-NHS hospital.

For patients waiting to see an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist, the CCG has made arrangements for some patients to be seen at another hospital for their care and treatment, if they are happy to do that. All those ENT patients affected by this should have already received a letter about this with further details. Please be assured that patients will only be transferred to a different hospital if they consent to that.

If you think you have been waiting more than 18 weeks for your treatment to start and you do not want to continue to wait until WHHT are able to see and treat you, then we will explore with you the possibility of being treated by an alternative hospital. The first thing to do is to find out how long you are likely to wait to be treated at WHHT.

To do this please:

- contact the department you have been dealing with; you should find those contact details listed in any letter you have received from WHHT
- phone the WHHT main telephone switchboard on 01923 244366 and they will be able to transfer you to the right department

- call the hospital's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01923 217198. You can find further information and further contact details on the website – <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/nhs-services-and-treatments/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service/>

Please note patients do have the right, under the NHS constitution, to be seen somewhere else if they can't have their treatment within the 18 weeks as expected. If you decide that you would like to have your treatment at a different hospital, it is possible that you may not be seen more quickly and some appointments and investigations may need to be repeated so that the new doctors are fully aware of your medical needs. If you still want to pursue this option, please contact your GP surgery; you won't necessarily need to make another appointment to see your GP to request the change of hospital.