

Sunderland Breast Care Services – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Why was the breast care service in Sunderland stopped in December 2014?

The breast care service in Sunderland was closed to new referrals on 18 December 2014. The reason was that City Hospitals Sunderland was unable to provide the required consultant-led service. This was agreed with Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group.

2. I was diagnosed before December 2014. What care will I receive now and where will I have to go?

City Hospitals Sunderland continue to look after patients who were diagnosed before December 2014. Consultant general surgeon Mr Boobis is seeing patients in clinics and breast care nurses are seeing patients in nurse-led clinics at Sunderland Royal Hospital. The Sunderland-based oncology team are also providing support to patients as needed.

3. Why is there no service for new patients in Sunderland at the moment?

A high-quality breast care service needs clinical leadership and care from a breast surgeon. No breast surgeon is available for a Sunderland-based service. NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is responsible for planning and purchasing high-quality breast care services. The CCG has been working hard with other hospitals in the North East to make sure that all patients who need breast care services can have their assessment and treatment. The CCG and local hospitals are working hard to have a Sunderland-based service for patients as soon as possible.

4. Where can I get breast care services now? Who can my GP refer me to?

Currently your GP can refer you to local NHS hospitals for assessment and treatment. These services are available in Gateshead, Newcastle and Durham. You should be able to discuss which hospital you prefer to be referred to.

5. Are there problems with breast care services in other parts of the North East/country? There is a known shortage of breast care surgeons and breast radiologists in England.

6. What are the hospital/CCG doing to make things better for patients in Sunderland?

The CCG and local hospitals are working together to develop a Sunderland based breast care assessment service which we hope will start in April 2016.

7. I have been seen in Gateshead/Newcastle/Durham for a diagnosis. Where will I have surgery/chemo/radiotherapy/follow-up outpatient appointments?

The majority (more than 90%) of patients who require referral to the breast care assessment service do not need any additional treatment.

If surgery is required this will be undertaken at the hospital where you have been assessed. Radiotherapy treatment, if required, is provided in Newcastle. Any chemotherapy could be provided by the hospital that you were seen at or in Sunderland by the oncology team there.

Breast Care Nurses (BCNs)

8. I have heard that the nurses have left Sunderland and are now working in Gateshead. Is that correct?

Yes, the breast care nurses have left Sunderland and are now working for Gateshead Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. We currently have an arrangement where the breast care nurses are coming back to Sunderland to see patients in clinics. A telephone-based service is also provided by the breast care nurses for all patients.

9. What services will Sunderland patients receive from the breast care nurses now?

The breast care nurses are still delivering clinics at Sunderland once a week for existing patients.

10. How can patients contact the BCNs?

Patients can contact the previous breast care nurse telephone extension number and leave a message. A nurse will pick up these messages and will make sure that patients get the appropriate advice/treatment.

11. How can BCNs help Sunderland patients?

The BCNs will help Sunderland patients by seeing them in clinic, if required, or by contacting them by telephone if support/advice cannot be provided by the nurse at Sunderland.

12. I have heard there is a telephone service - how does this work and how can I find out the number to call?

The number to call is 0191 565 6256 ext 47351. Please leave a message and the nurse will get back to you as soon as possible. She might be able to give advice and support via telephone or if necessary she will arrange to see you herself or arrange an appointment for you with one of the BCNs or Mr Boobis, the consultant surgeon. The nurse does have experience of breast care.

13. Continuity of care and advice is very important to me. How can I develop a relationship with my BCN if they work in Gateshead now?

The breast care nurses are employed by Gateshead Hospitals. It is agreed that they will provide advice and support to patients in Sunderland via Sunderland clinics and a telephone support line. It is expected that patients will continue to have a supportive relationship with the breast care nurses as before.

Future services

14. What is the plan for new patients in the future?

The plan is for a one-stop breast care assessment clinic to be provided at Grindon Lane Primary Care Centre. This will be the same service which is currently available at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead. It will be staffed by a combination of workers from Gateshead Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland. The expectation is that the new service will start in April 2016. Patients will be seen for assessment and follow-up at Grindon Lane.

15. Can patients get their surgery/treatment in Sunderland?

If required, surgery will be undertaken in Gateshead, radiotherapy in Newcastle, chemotherapy in Sunderland. Follow-up clinics will take place in Grindon Lane, Sunderland.

16. What can be done to reduce the number of different hospitals that I need to go to get surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy? Will all the hospitals have the same patient notes? Will I have to repeat my story over and over again?

The new breast care assessment service will be provided by Gateshead Hospitals. The patient information will be in the patient record and this will be used for all assessment and treatment provided by the Gateshead service (in Grindon Lane and Gateshead locations).

17. You keep hearing that the NHS is short of money. Have services been taken away from Sunderland because of money?

Money was not the reason that the services were stopped in Sunderland in December 2014. Patients are still being seen and treated as they need it but they have had to be seen in other hospitals which are able to provide the full range of experts required to ensure a high-quality service and patient care.

18. I have heard the plan is to have a one-stop shop - what does this mean for patients?

A one-stop shop is designed to ensure that patients can be assessed by clinicians and have the required tests done at the same time to be able to reach a diagnosis. This is designed to reduce the need for repeated hospital visits and reduce the stress for patients and their families at this difficult time. The majority of patients who attend a one-stop shop assessment unit do not need any further tests or treatment. There are some patients who may need more complex and time-consuming tests to ensure that they get the right diagnosis and best treatment. These patients may need to attend for additional appointments.

19. If I can't be seen in Sunderland, will I have to wait longer to be seen at another hospital?

No, the standards for waiting times are the same for all hospitals in England. The CCG monitors these very closely with all hospitals which provide treatment for people who live in Sunderland.

20. How will I know if another hospital has a good service that I can be sure of?

All hospitals in England have to meet the same high-quality standards. The CCG and the CQC monitor these very closely.

21. Will my GP know what is going on with my care?

All hospitals are required to ensure that your general practitioner is informed about your care. You will also have the opportunity to have a copy of letters which are sent to your GP.

22. Who can I talk to about my concerns about the care I have had?

You can talk to your GP or you can contact the hospital and talk to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) which can provide confidential advice and support to help you with queries and

concerns. PALS can also provide general information about NHS services. If you have a complaint you can make this to the hospital where you had your care. If you are unable to complain yourself, someone can act on your behalf with your written consent. You can make your complaint in writing, by email, or verbally.

A complaint should be made within 12 months from the date it occurred or when it came to your attention. In some cases if there is good reason why you could not complain sooner and it is still possible to investigate your complaint, it may be possible to waive the time limit.

If your complaint is about a hospital, community or mental health service you should send this to the NHS organisation involved. If your complaint is about a GP practice, dental practice, community pharmacy or optician you should send this to the practice concerned.

If your complaint is about a CCG commissioning or funding decision you should send this to:

Mr David Gallagher
Chief Officer
NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group
Pemberton House
Colima Avenue
Sunderland
SR5 3XB