

Report on the outcome of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) routine inspection of Southampton General Hospital in October 2012

From : Judy Gillow, director of nursing

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Background

The Trust is inspected at least once a year by the CQC which regulates healthcare providers in England. In October 2012 a CQC inspection team arrived unannounced at Southampton General Hospital and reviewed the following standards :

Standards Reviewed	CQC Judgement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent to treatment 	Compliant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care and welfare of people who use services 	Minor concerns – action required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding people who use services from abuse 	Compliant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of medicines 	Minor concerns – action required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record management 	Minor concerns – action required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing 	Moderate concerns – action required

The report of the inspection was published on the CQC web site in early December 2012 and it highlights some areas where the hospital needs to further develop its systems and processes. This is particularly the case in the instance where the hospital is under significant operational pressure and on “Black Alert” which was the status of the hospital on the day of the CQC visit.

Inspection Feedback

Feedback from patients

The summary of the report highlights the overwhelmingly positive feedback of patients and their families in relation to the hospital’s staff and the care they had received. They noted that the staff were incredibly hard working.

Feedback on the standards reviewed

Many of the 13 wards that the CQC visited were compliant against the standards but in a small number, specific issues were observed that did not reflect the Trust’s defined quality standards or clinical policies and this contributed negatively to the final assessment of the hospital’s compliance.

Feedback from the CQC demonstrated that when the Hospital is under significant operational pressure, the high standard of care patients expect is not always consistently delivered.

The areas of care delivery in which minor concerns have been raised fall into four general categories:

- Drugs administration
- Patient nutrition
- Full completion and documentation of clinical risk assessments and care plans
- Efficient and safe management of discharge including TTOs.

Plans are in place to strengthen the hospital's performance in meeting standards consistently in these areas and these have been agreed with the CQC. The Trust was not asked to take any immediate specified actions or given any enforcement notices in these areas and they will check that compliance in these areas have been reached in their future inspections.

Staffing

The high levels of vacancies in ward-based staff, notably among nurses, was raised as a moderate concern on the basis that it might present a risk to the consistent delivery of high quality patient care.

This has been a recognised challenge at the Trust for the last twelve months during which the hospital has been expanding its capacity to meet growing demand. Filling vacant posts with suitably qualified nurses has become increasingly difficult and after national recruitment efforts failed to deliver the staff required, the Trust has been actively recruiting from overseas as well as taking on and developing newly qualified nurses graduating from the University of Southampton.

Over the last 12 months an additional 110 nurses have been added to the numbers working at Southampton General taking the total nurses in post to 3346. This number will continue to grow as the Trust works through its nurse recruitment plan which the CQC reviewed and approved. Overall the Trust aims to take its vacancy rate in nursing down from 9 percent to around 5 per cent. A vacancy rate of 7% in this staff group would be considered acceptable.

Given recent media coverage it is vital to point out that the CQC report did not describe staffing in the hospital as unsafe. Its concern was that the vacancy rate, which has led to high numbers of temporary staff being used as well as permanent staff being moved between wards might prove a risk to quality of care. The hospital is aware of this risk and has robust procedures in place for monitoring staff levels on the wards and assessing and dealing with any risks as and when they arise. As vacancies are filled during 2013, the number of temporary staff working in nursing posts will also reduce.

The Trust Board of University Hospital Southampton will be overseeing through Judy Gillow, Director of Nursing, delivery of the key actions to demonstrate full compliance to the CQC.