

Over the years the Society has taken a special interest in health issues, not least because the population served by the Sole Bay Health Centre is typically older; around 33% of us are over 65, versus 16% nationally, and across the whole of the Great Yarmouth and Waveney area for which our Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is responsible it is set to double in 20 years.

The CCG has issued a consultation document describing major changes in care, and we have been working with them as part of the consultation process. At the next meeting of the Society's Executive Committee, the CCG's Chief Executive Officer, Andy Evans, will attend to clarify some points and answer some of the many queries that our members have raised. The consultation process will last until 3<sup>rd</sup> September – if you have not received a copy of the summary document, it is available in the Health Centre and in Southwold Library, or on the CCG website

The main thrust of the new strategy is to focus on keeping patients in their own homes under the care of 'Out of Hospital Teams' (OHTs), or if that is not possible, to use local 'beds with care', or 'intermediate care beds' where the OHT staff will have access to a higher level of facilities.

The execution of the proposed policy will entail major re-juggling of resources, and will require new buildings as well as recruitment and training of staff. In outline, for Southwold, Reydon and surrounding villages, this entails:

- Setting up an OHT based at the Sole Bay Health Centre 'hub'
- Closing Southwold Hospital, possibly as early as April 2016
- NHS-funded 'beds with care' in Southwold or Reydon
- Converting Beccles Hospital into 'intermediate care beds'

The quality and strength of the OHT, which will provide care at home or in the new local beds are critical to the success of this strategy; from the consultation document you will see that they are made up of: A Team Leader, Community nurses, Social workers, Physiotherapists, Occupational therapists, Assistant Practitioners, Health Care Assistants and Administrative support.

- At a public meeting held in Southwold on June 10<sup>th</sup> many questions and concerns were raised: Would the OHTs and the new 'beds with care and 'intermediate beds' all be in place before the closure of Southwold Hospital? Andy Evans responded with a firm commitment to do just that, stating that the NHS owns the land next to the Sole Bay Health Centre, it has planning permission to build a new Care Home, and is seeking a private partner to build and operate this Care Home. Until it is built, the CCG will 'block purchase' the 5 or 6 beds needed in either St Barnabas or Oaklands.
- Would the OHT be adequately staffed, given the relatively elderly profile of the local population? Dr Stammers said that he is confident on this, but clearly given the future increase in older patients, the team will have to expand over time. As yet, we do not know the starting numbers for the OHT, but the CCG has informed us that the Lowestoft OHT has 40 and the Northern OHT has 63.
- A third matter was the contentious issue of what will happen to Southwold Hospital. We have contacted the CCG and NHS Property Services and they have confirmed what they told us some years ago, namely that the hospital site and buildings were transferred to the ownership of the old Ministry of Health in 1948, so they belong to the NHS. Andy Evans pointed out that the NHS had spent about £5m on the Sole Bay Health Centre (buildings, on-costs and equipment), and that the NHS had maintained and improved Southwold Hospital over the last 67 years, but many will no doubt argue that the original cost was raised by local public subscription, and that, mainly through the League of Friends, much more money has since come from the people of Southwold and Reydon.

The proposed changes in the delivery of health care are in line with modern medical thinking, and have been introduced successfully elsewhere. They also will allow the CCG to make substantial financial savings, but CCG representatives emphasise that these are not the main reason for the new plans.

Lastly, the CCG has agreed to hold a further public meeting, and this will be held on 9<sup>th</sup> July in Reydon Village Hall at 7.30 pm.

John Stewart, President