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Media Release

GP's and RUH cardiologist pioneer new way to treat heart failure patients

A simple blood test for people suspected of suffering from heart failure could save unnecessary hospital scans and an anxious wait, thanks to a joint venture between an RUH cardiologist and GPs in Bath and Wiltshire

People with possible symptoms of heart failure and living in the Bath area, no longer need to be automatically referred to the Royal United Hospital (RUH) where an echo-cardiogram or ECG can be carried out. Instead, GPs across Bath and North East Somerset, will now offer a blood test which will then be analysed for an enzyme. This enzyme, B-Type natriuretic peptide (BNP), is present in the blood stream only if the muscles of the wall of the heart are put under significant strain. Patients will then be given their results within 48 hours. Only if the blood test is positive will an ECG be carried out at the RUH.

It is estimated that this new patient pathway will benefit about 10 patients at every GP practice within the NHS B&NES catchment area. It has also been estimated to save the NHS locally up to £60,000 a year through better use of resources.

Consultant Cardiologist, Dr Jacob Easaw and GP, Dr Ruth Grabham from Newbridge Surgery in Bath worked closely together to create this new diagnostic service for patients. Dr Grabham is the Clinical Director of the new clinical commissioning group established in Bath and North East Somerset which will take over local health and care planning from the primary care trust when it's abolished in April 2013.

"We want to use this opportunity of clinically-led commissioning to improve services for patients," said Dr Grabham. "This new pathway for diagnosing heart failure will significantly reduce anxiety for a lot of patients. Now, a simple blood test could rule out the problem in a matter of days. A blood test is also much cheaper than a hospital outpatient appointment, so this new service shows it is possible to change services, improve patient experience and save money all at the same time."

Dr Easaw, the clinical lead in cardiology at the RUH commented, "This partnership will lead to improved early diagnosis of heart failure and this means as cardiac specialists we can focus more of our attention and resources on those patients who need our skills the most. We will see high risk patients earlier than in the past which means treatment can be more effective. It also avoids unnecessary scans and worries for those people who the blood test shows do not have heart failure."

This is the kind of change to the health system that is being championed through clinical commissioning. By using the clinical experience of frontline GPs, nurses and hospital specialists to plan local health and care services, patients can benefit from better services and improved outcomes. GPs in Wiltshire have been involved in the project but health service commissioners in Wiltshire have not yet decided whether to fund the service for patients in the county.

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