

Annual Report

2009 - 2010

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Introduction:

For us, one of the highlights from 2009/10 is the way in which our services and standards of care are being recognised by the people who really matter – patients.

Major surveys of in-patients and out-patients highlighted that we are actually one of the best-performing trusts in the South West.

In the bustle of everyday life on the wards, in the back offices and out in the community, it's very easy to miss this bigger picture. Our staff are, rightly, concerned with their own work and their own patients.

Of course they receive many 'thank yous' – often verbally, sometimes in writing – but the silent majority of patients can only be reached with major surveys.

So when in-patients put us significantly above the NHS average in 11 categories, most notably involving the consideration with which they are treated by our nurses and doctors, it really does matter. That consistency puts us ahead of any other hospital trust in Devon, Cornwall or Somerset.

Our out-patients were equally impressed. Their responses put the Trust among the top 20% across the NHS in 34 out of 40 categories, with our doctors particularly well-rated for the way they deal with patients at clinics.

While highlighting issues such as stress and levels of violence and aggression – mainly involving patients – our staff also generally put Northern Devon among the best trusts.

This emphasis on the views, rights and responsibilities of patients and staff is reflected in the structure of our annual report, which is linked to the new NHS Constitution. This came into force on 1 April 2010.

As you look through the different elements of the constitution at the edge of the page, examples of how we have performed are shown alongside. For example, we continued to drive down levels of infection and to offer waiting times as short as anywhere else in the country.

When combined with the survey results, it is clear to us that the real challenge will be to maintain progress during the coming years. Our immediate priorities for improving standards during 2010-11 are set out in our first Quality Account, available from the Trust website: www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk/

We know that public finances will be tight and that innovation will be needed to make sure we continue to provide people with the care and treatment they deserve.

That's why we are working with the rest of the NHS across Devon to improve systems and collaboration, which have the potential to bring major gains for patients. This might mean making much more use of alternatives to hospital admission, for example, by building on the progress already made in day surgery and in helping people with long-term conditions.

This is where joint teams with social services and smooth transfers from hospital to community care – both further ahead in northern Devon than anywhere else – will have major parts to play.

Our thanks go to everyone who has worked so hard to get us where we are today, and to local people who continue to provide us with their support. We don't take any of this for granted.

Brian Sherwin
Chairman

Jac Kelly
Chief Executive

Trust background:

NHS Values:

Respect and dignity: We value each person as an individual, respect their aspirations and commitments in life and seek to understand their priorities, needs, abilities and limits. We take what others have to say seriously. We are honest about our point of view and what can and cannot do.

Commitment to quality of care: We earn the trust placed in us by insisting on quality and striving to get the basics right every time: safety, confidentiality, professional and managerial integrity, accountability, dependable service and good communication. We welcome feedback, learn from our mistakes and build on our successes.

Compassion: We respond with humanity and kindness to each person's pain, distress, anxiety or need. We search for the things we can do, however small, to give comfort and relieve suffering. We find time for those we serve and work alongside. We do not wait to be asked, because we care.

Improving lives: We strive to improve health and wellbeing and people's experiences of the NHS. We value excellence and professionalism wherever we find it – in the everyday things that make people's lives better as much as in clinical practice, service improvements and innovation.

Working together for patients: We put patients first in everything we do, by reaching out to staff, patients, carers, families, communities, and professionals outside the NHS. We put the needs of patients and communities before organisational boundaries.

Everyone counts: We use our resources for the benefit of the whole community and make sure nobody is excluded or left behind. We accept that some people need more help, that difficult decisions have to be taken – and that when we waste resources we waste others' opportunities. We recognise that we all have a part to play in making ourselves and our communities healthier.

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust was established in 1991 to provide hospital healthcare services to the 165,000 local residents and the thousands of visitors this region receives every summer.

The Trust is responsible for the management of and services provided from the following bases:

- Barnstaple Health Centre
- Bideford Community Hospital
- Holsworthy Community Hospital
- Tyrrell Community Hospital, Ilfracombe

- Lynton Resource Centre
- North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple
- South Molton Community Hospital
- Torrington Community Hospital

The Trust has a total of 281 acute beds and 110 community beds across its sites. As of 1 April 2010, we employed an average of 2,254 whole time equivalent staff and operated with an annual budget of £130.9million.

Our vision

Our Trust will deliver safe and effective healthcare to the local population through a partnership with staff, patients, the public and other organisations.

Our values

Integrity - We will act with integrity and openness

Diversity - We will treat others fairly and equally and value diversity

Compassion - We will demonstrate care and compassion

Support - We will listen and support others and make time to do so

Excellence - We will strive for excellence in all that we do

Modern, integrated care

The full range of acute, community and social care services provided by this Trust make it almost unique in the UK. We provide 24/7 emergency care services and a full range of elective secondary care services, such as orthopaedics, colorectal 'keyhole' surgery, acute stroke care and cancer services at North Devon District Hospital.

Our community teams provide a full range of district nursing, community nursing, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, sexual health and family planning services. These community services were further strengthened by the integration with adult social care in 2008. More and more care is being provided in community settings and this Trust is ideally structured to tailor services to each individual patient.

Our area

Northern Devon has a population of around 165,000, dispersed across 950 square miles. This resident population rises every year with 250,000 visitors. The area is a popular retirement destination and has a third more older people than the national average. Earnings are 15% below the UK average and there are significant housing problems for working families due to the affordability gap created by the arrival of relatively-affluent retirees and by the number of second homes.

The main acute hospital in Barnstaple, North Devon District Hospital, is particularly isolated from other major centres of acute care. The Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital in Exeter and Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton are both 50 miles away; Derriford Hospital in Plymouth is 100 miles away.

Our community

Planners expect the Northern Devon population will rise by 24,000 by 2031 – mainly in the over-60 age group. There are 20,000 new homes planned to be built in North Devon between now and 2021.

There are stark differences in life expectancy compared to the rest of Devon. Devon's Strategic Review identifies an 18-year gap in life expectancy between the most-deprived areas in Northern Devon and the least-deprived areas in Devon. Some of the most-deprived communities are in Ilfracombe, Torrington and Barnstaple.



Map showing the hospitals managed by the Northern Devon Healthcare Trust in relation to the two nearest acute hospitals in Exeter and Taunton.

Principles that guide the NHS:

NHS Constitution says:

- The NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all
- Access to NHS services is based on clinical need, not an individual's ability to pay
- The NHS aspires to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism
- NHS services must reflect the needs and preferences of patients, their families and carers
- The NHS works across organisational boundaries and in partnership with other organisations in the interests of patients, local communities and the wider population
- The NHS is committed to providing best value for taxpayers' money and the most effective, fair and sustainable use of finite resources.
- The NHS is accountable to the public, communities and patients that it serves.

Equal and inclusive

Our aim in northern Devon is to ensure that all our local people receive the healthcare they need, at the time they need it, regardless of their background. We want to provide a healthcare service that promotes equality and respects the diversity of the local population.

To guide us in this, we developed an Inclusive Equality Scheme in 2009.

In 2010, we are planning some leaflets specifically designed for patients with learning disabilities.

Value for money

In 2008/09 the Care Quality Commission rated the Trust's financial management as 'good'. The Commission concluded that we are performing well and we have met financial targets for at least the past two years.

The Trust is on target to retain its overall rating of three under the Auditors Local Evaluation, which measures financial management, risk management and value for money.

For more details, please see the Operating and Financial Review.

Accountability

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust is steered by the Trust Board, which meets regularly to set strategy and to receive assurance that quality and safety standards are being met by those managing the day-to-day operations.

The Board is chaired by Brian Sherwin. Alongside Mr Sherwin sit five executive directors and five part-time non-executive directors. Non-executive directors are local people who provide a direct link with their communities and who bring skills and knowledge from outside into the NHS. The Chair and non-executives are accountable to the Secretary of State.

The Chief Executive and six other executive directors are responsible for running the Trust on a day-to-day basis. The Board hold the Trust's executive director team to account for performance.

All of the Trust's Board meetings are open to the public, with meeting papers published on the Trust's website. The Trust's Annual General Meeting is advertised widely in the press, and members of the public are encouraged to attend.

Complex Care Teams

Complex Care Teams offer a new service for people who need continuing help from local health and social services. The teams provide direct support to adults who have several long-term medical conditions as well as needing support from social care staff.

Northern Devon Healthcare is one of the first trusts in the country to adopt this integrated approach. We are breaking down boundaries between different agencies so that patients don't get passed from one agency to the other.

The aim is to help people live as independently as possible.

Each team comprises specialists from different agencies, working closely together.

Access to health services:

NHS Constitution says:

- You have the right to receive NHS services free of charge, apart from certain limited exceptions sanctioned by Parliament.
- You have the right to access NHS services. You will not be refused access on unreasonable grounds.
- You have the right to expect your local NHS to assess the health requirements of the local community and to commission and put in place the services to meet those needs.
- You have the right, in certain circumstances, to go to other European Economic Area countries or Switzerland for treatment which would be available through your NHS commissioner.
- You have the right not to be unlawfully discriminated against in the provision of NHS services including on grounds of gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability or age.
- You have the right to access services within maximum waiting times, or for the NHS to take all reasonable steps to offer you a range of alternative providers if this is not possible.
- The NHS also commits to take decisions in a clear and transparent way, so that patients and the public can understand how services are planned and delivered.
- The NHS also commits to make the transition as smooth as possible when you are referred between services, and to include you in relevant discussions.

Keeping waiting times down

Northern Devon Healthcare continues to be one of the best trusts across the South West in terms of ensuring that patients are treated within 18 weeks of referral.

During 2009/10, we consistently treated over 95% of patients requiring admission, and over 99% of patients not needing admission, within 18 weeks. The national target is 90%.

This helped make us the best trust across the whole NHS for waiting time performance, when rated by local people as part of the national in-patient survey for 2009.

Local clinics

The Trust provides a range of out-patient clinics in its community hospitals, including rheumatology in South Molton and Bideford, family planning in Torrington and eye clinics in Stratton Hospital in Bude.

Moving between services

Our Pathfinder Team organises timely and safe discharges for patients who require ongoing care or support after leaving hospital.

In 2010 we appointed two Complex Discharge Co-ordinators. Their role is to work with our hospital teams to help ensure that patients with complex needs can be discharged safely and don't have to stay in hospital any longer than they need to.

Working with healthcare commissioners

We work closely with NHS Devon, the organisation which commissions healthcare services on behalf of the local population.

We also have close clinical links with other hospitals, especially the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust. This means patients can be treated in northern Devon wherever possible, but in a more-specialised centre if required. This approach is used successfully in cancer care, and ear, nose and throat work, for example.

Quality of care and environment:

NHS Constitution says:

- You have the right to be treated with a professional standard of care, by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, in a properly approved or registered organisation that meets required levels of safety and quality.
- You have the right to expect NHS organisations to monitor, and make efforts to improve, the quality of healthcare they commission or provide.
- The NHS commits to ensure that services are provided in a clean and safe environment that is fit for purpose, based on national best practice.
- The NHS commits to continuous improvement in the quality of services you receive, identifying and sharing best practice in quality of care and treatments.

Meeting the latest standards

On 1 April 2010, services run by Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust were registered unconditionally by the Care Quality Commission, which regulates standards across the country.

This means the Care Quality Commission accepts that the Trust meets essential standards for quality and safety.

Safe care in a safe environment

The safety of patients is at the top of our list of priorities. We believe people who come into our hospitals, or are cared for in the community by our staff, should be absolutely confident that we are doing the right thing in the right way.

Preventing infections

We report to every meeting of the Trust Board on all aspects of infection and its prevention and control, reflecting the seriousness with which the issues are taken.

Last year, we continued to make real progress in reducing the number of patients who contracted infections.

By the end of 2009/10, the Clostridium Difficile total was 23 cases – well below our limit of 39, and less than half the level of infection recorded in 2008-09.

Similarly, the year saw four cases of MRSA bacteraemia (bloodstream infection), which was well below our limit of eight.

Norovirus

One of the biggest challenges last year was posed by norovirus and similar bugs that cause diarrhoea and vomiting. Although not as dangerous to patients as Clostridium difficile or MRSA, these bugs are highly-contagious in a confined setting like a hospital ward.

The problem is made all the greater because norovirus is widespread in the community, which means that anyone coming into the hospital – patient, visitor, staff – might bring the bug with them. This makes hand hygiene hugely important, and is why we urge everyone to use the alcohol gel outside each ward.

Although we had managed to keep the numbers of cases at a low level compared to many other trusts around the South West, there was a marked increase in cases early in 2010. In each case, bays and sometimes entire wards had to be closed to new patients for at least 48 hours while our Infection Control Team oversaw disinfection.

At one point in March, we had to close our Medical Assessment Unit for a few days, with knock-on effects including the cancellation of some operations. Visiting restrictions also had to be put in place from 1 April.

How to beat norovirus

Please help us keep norovirus at bay by:

- Always using the alcohol gel at the doors to each ward
- Making sure our staff wash their hands between seeing patients – don't be afraid to tell them if they forget
- Not visiting anyone in hospital if you have had diarrhoea and/or vomiting in the previous 48 hours
- Not visiting anyone in hospital if you have been with anyone else who has had diarrhoea and/or vomiting in the previous 48 hours

'A clean environment' – according to our patients

We achieved very good results in the national out-patient survey, published by the Care Quality Commission in February 2010. On both questions about cleanliness – covering the toilets and the hospital environment – we were among the best 20% of trusts across the NHS.

Similarly, in the 2009 inpatient survey, 97% of respondents said the toilets were fairly or very clean. The figure climbed to 99% for the wards.

Patient Environment Action Team

Our hospitals provide the best environments for patients in Devon and are in the top 20% in England, according to figures released in July 2009 by the National Patient Safety Agency in its annual Patient Environment Action Team assessments.

The community hospitals in Torrington, South Molton, Bideford and Holsworthy, as well as North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple, were each rated 'excellent' in all three of the categories measured - cleanliness and environment, food, and privacy and dignity. The Tyrrell Hospital at Ilfracombe was not included because it has too few beds.

| Hospital | Cleanliness & environment | Food | Privacy & dignity |
|---|---------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| North Devon District | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent |
| Holsworthy | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent |
| Bideford | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent |
| Torrington | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent |
| South Molton | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent |
| % of other hospitals in England rated 'Excellent' | 23.9% | 57.8% | 43.6% |

Table 1: 2009 results, Patient Environment Action Team.

Safeguarding children and young people

In January 2010, the Trust Board declared that the organisation meets all the requirements of the Care Quality Commission to ensure that systems and processes are in place to safeguard children and young people.

Tackling falls and fractures

There is a drive across the South West to reduce the toll on patients from falls and fractures.

A review carried out in September 2009 highlighted several areas of strength for northern Devon. These included the speed of admission via Accident & Emergency for people with fractured hips, numbers operated on within 48 hours, and liaison between acute and community care for patients being transferred. We have more to do on geriatric care and community rehabilitation.

Our action to tackle falls and fractures in 2009-10 included:

- Setting up classes across northern Devon to help people develop strength and balance
- Training for staff on screening patients for the risk of falls and fractures
- Developing a clear referral 'pathway' to make sure patients at risk of falls can get the help they need
- Improving the transfer time for patients with hip fractures from A&E to the orthopaedic ward
- Registering with the national hip fracture database
- Measuring our therapy support for community in-patients and domiciliary services against guidance on best practice

Further progress is needed in areas, such as:

- Starting community falls clinics
- Providing additional specialist cover at North Devon District Hospital

New bed-tracking system

March 2010 saw a major upgrade of our computerised Patient Administration System (PAS), which keeps a record of all patients as they progress through our services.

Swift Plus is the most significant improvement to our PAS in 20 years. It's designed to be faster, so nurses and doctors can spend less time on the computer and more time on direct patient care.

One of its most exciting features is a discreet 'virtual whiteboard', which holds key patient information, including the progress of investigations and discharge arrangements. Anyone involved in a patient's care can check on the position at a glance – an important consideration for handovers between shifts, for example.

We are the first trust to adopt Swift Plus in the South West. Others due to follow include South Devon Healthcare and Royal Cornwall Hospitals.

Nationally-approved treatments, drugs and programmes:

NHS Constitution says:

- You have the right to drugs and treatments that have been recommended by NICE for use in the NHS, if your doctor says they are clinically appropriate for you.
- You have the right to expect local decisions on funding of other drugs and treatments to be made rationally following a proper consideration of the evidence.
- You have the right to receive the vaccinations that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommends that you should receive under an NHS-provided national immunisation programme
- The NHS commits to provide screening programmes as recommended by the UK National Screening Committee.

The Trust is part of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Programme.

In 2010, we purchased a scope guide for use in bowel cancer screening and other colonoscopy procedures. The scope guide reduces the risk of discomfort for patients, increasing success rates and enabling us to examine more patients.

The Trust is grateful to the League of Friends for funding this purchase.

Respect, consent and confidentiality:

NHS Constitution says:

- You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with your human rights.
- You have the right to accept or refuse treatment that is offered to you, and not be given any physical examination or treatment unless you have given valid consent.
- You have the right to be given information about your proposed treatment in advance, including any significant risks and alternative treatments, and the risks involved in doing nothing.
- You have the right to privacy and confidentiality and to expect the NHS to keep your confidential information safe and secure.
- You have the right of access to your own health records. These will always be used to manage your treatment in your best interests.
- The NHS commits to share with you any letters sent between clinicians about your care.

Same-sex accommodation

Every patient has the right to high-quality care that is safe and effective, and respects their privacy and dignity. Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust is committed to providing every patient with same-sex accommodation, to help safeguard their privacy and dignity when they are often at their most vulnerable.

Although wards admit both male and female patients, individual bays within the wards are single sex except in emergencies.

We are proud to confirm that mixed-sex accommodation has been virtually eliminated in our Trust from 2009.

Information for patients

Our patient information leaflet service produces more than 300 different titles, covering all specialties offered by the Trust.

The leaflets cover the risks of treatment and non-treatment, as well as any alternative treatment options for conditions.

In 2010, we will be exploring the use of patient information videos to further improve our advance information to patients.

New community unit opens at Bideford Hospital

- We opened a brand new community unit, the Willow Community Unit, at Bideford Hospital in July 2009.
- The unit, which replaced the old George and Margaret wards, was refurbished to the highest standards. It is at the centre of the Trust's plans to create a vibrant 'health hub' for the Torridge community.
- The new resource offers state-of-the art facilities, including:
 - Nine side rooms with en-suite bathroom to enhance privacy and dignity for all patients
 - Fully-accessible therapeutic garden
 - Separate facilities for men and women, complying with the latest national standards.

Informed consent

Patients have a fundamental legal and ethical right to determine what happens to their own bodies whilst in our care.

Valid consent to treatment is therefore absolutely central in all forms of healthcare, from providing personal care to undertaking major surgery. Seeking consent is also a matter of common courtesy between health professionals and patients.

The Trust's Consent Policy ensures that consent is central to care at the Trust, and that we meet nationally-recognised standards for best practice.

What our out-patients say

The results of the 2009 National Out-patient Department Survey show that the Trust's doctors are particularly well rated for the time they devote to discussing patients' health problems with them, listening to patients and explaining treatments.

Overall, 87% of Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust patients said their doctor listened to their concerns and 84% said that their doctor explained things in a way they could understand.

Confidentiality

The Trust's new computerised system on all wards mean that patients' personal information is no longer visible on old-style wall-mounted whiteboards.

Copies of letters to GPs

The 2009 survey of inpatients told us that we were not yet providing all our patients with copies of letters to their GP. As a result, we have introduced this as a new procedure.

Informed choice:

NHS Constitution says:

- You have the right to choose your GP practice, and to be accepted by that practice unless there are reasonable grounds to refuse, in which case you will be informed of those reasons.
- You have the right to express a preference for using a particular doctor within your GP practice, and for the practice to try to comply
- You have the right to make choices about your NHS care and to information to support these choices.
- The NHS commits to inform you about the healthcare services available to you, locally and nationally.
- The NHS commits to offer you easily accessible, reliable and relevant information to enable you to participate fully in your own healthcare decisions and to support you in making choices. This will include information on the quality of clinical services where there is robust and accurate information available.

Enabling choice

We are part of NHS Choices, the website that gives patients up-to-date information on services offered by all NHS Trusts across the UK. The site includes the latest information on Trust performance as well as feedback from our patients.

Performance information is also published on the Trust's own website, www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk, including the full Annual Health Check report from the Care Quality Commission. Details of the services and specialties we offer are also displayed.

Our Trust website receives 78,000 visits a year, with more than 15,000 visits to the 'Our Services' section.

The Annual Healthcheck

Every year, the Care Quality Commission assesses all trusts for the quality of their services and their financial management. In the latest version, published in October 2009, the Trust complied with all 44 core standards, including the nine relating to patient safety:

1. Reporting patient safety incidents
2. Acting on patient safety notices
3. Safeguarding children
4. Following guidance issued by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)
5. Reducing infection risks by maintaining high standards of cleanliness and hygiene, with annual reductions in MRSA rates
6. Acquiring and using medical devices in a safe way
7. Decontaminating equipment
8. Handling medicines
9. Disposing of waste

Our overall rating from the Care Quality Commission was 'good' for financial management – up from last year's 'fair' rating.

However, technical problems with transferring the Trust's data at the end of the year meant that instead of being rated 'excellent' on our quality of services, the Trust was rated 'fair'. This was a drop from last year's 'good' rating.

Choosing where to give birth

According to the Care Quality Commission, 81% of women in England said they had a choice of place of birth. Around 57% of women said they were offered the option of a home birth.

The figure for Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust is much higher, with 91% of women who were surveyed saying they had been offered the choice of a home birth.

Maternity unit information film

In December 2009, the Trust released a film about the maternity unit at North Devon District Hospital. Available on YouTube and the Trust's website, the film allows all parents-to-be to find out what to expect, and what choices they will have, during labour and childbirth.

Delivering services locally

The Trust has brought some specialist services back to northern Devon from larger hospitals in Exeter, Plymouth and Bristol. Rheumatology patients on the borders of our area who were going to Exeter or Plymouth are now coming back to northern Devon. Meanwhile, our networked haematology service, for example, means that patients needing specialist haematology opinion are coming to North Devon District Hospital instead of travelling to Exeter.

New macular degeneration service

The Trust launched a new service to help prevent vision loss in patients. Since April 2009, we have been running three clinics a week for patients with Wet Age-related Macular Degeneration – the main cause of sight loss in people over 65 years of age.

Previously, northern Devon patients with the condition had to travel to Torbay once a month to receive treatment.

The service, which is run by new consultant Mr Achim Nestel, is already delivering some of the best results in the South West for improving patients' sight.

Rehabilitation Officers for the Visually Impaired (ROVIs), from Devon County Council's Sensory Team, are also working alongside the service to provide advice and information for people with WAMD.

Involvement in your healthcare and in the NHS:

NHS Constitution says:

- You have the right to be involved in discussions and decisions about your healthcare, and to be given information to enable you to do this.
- You have the right to be involved, directly or through representatives, in the planning of healthcare services, the development and consideration of proposals for changes in the way those services are provided, and in decisions to be made affecting the operation of those services.
- The NHS commits to provide you with the information you need to influence and scrutinise the planning and delivery of NHS services.
- The NHS commits to work in partnership with you, your family, carers and representatives.

Patient and public involvement programme

In March 2010, the Trust and Devon Local Involvement Network (LINK) staged a public event to find the best way of ensuring that the patient's experience is always at the heart of local services.

The aim was to work out how patient participation could be strengthened, and to make a plan for putting ideas into action.

Hundreds of patients and carers came along. As a result of the meetings, we are setting up a group whose purpose is to advise us on the best way to involve our users. The group will be made up of at least 75% members of the public, with 25% Trust staff.

Improving signage

During 2009, we made improvements to signage at North Devon District Hospital.

Staff from the Trust worked with others from our hotel services company, Sodexo, together with representatives from the Senior Council and the Rehabilitation Officers for the Visually Impaired (ROVIs), to make sure that NDDH signage was patient-friendly and visitor-friendly.

As a result of this group's work, we have installed new, clearer signs in the main foyer as well as in the stair and lift lobbies. We have also added a new sign at the main pedestrian crossing from the patient car park.

Discussing the way forward for Torrington

During the summer of 2009, the Trust had an important discussion with patients and the public in the Torrington area. We wanted to find out what mattered most to local people about their local healthcare services, and how we could best meet local needs in the future.

We consulted extensively with Torrington residents via a questionnaire, which was completed by more than 300 people. A public drop-in session enabled the Trust to listen to the views of up to 100 further local people face-to-face.

Following these discussions, we are looking forward to working with NHS Devon, which commissions services on behalf of local residents, to ensure that all the options are thoroughly explored.

Complaint and redress:

NHS Constitution says:

- You have the right to have any complaint you make about NHS services dealt with efficiently and to have it properly investigated.
- You have the right to know the outcome of any investigation into your complaint
- You have the right to take your complaint to the independent Health Service Ombudsman, if you are not satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the NHS.
- You have the right to make a claim for judicial review if you think you have been directly affected by an unlawful act or decision of an NHS body.
- You have the right to compensation where you have been harmed by negligent treatment.
- The NHS commits to ensure you are treated with courtesy and you receive appropriate support throughout the handling of a complaint; and the fact you have complained will not adversely affect your future treatment.
- The NHS commits, when mistakes happen, to acknowledge them, apologise, explain what went wrong and put things right quickly and effectively.
- The NHS commits to ensure that the organisations learns lessons from complaints and claims and uses these to improve NHS services.

Customer relations

Our Customer Relations Department handles all complaints and ensures that patients and their families receive swift resolutions to any issues raised.

Our system has been further refined in 2009-10, with improved turnaround times and inbuilt systems to make sure that any lessons learned are acted upon across the organisation.

We have made a number of changes and improvements to address issues raised by patients, their families and carers.

Patients and the public have been involved in several projects to make service improvements. These include projects to change the signage around the North Devon District Hospital, to make improvements for patients with sensory impairments, to improve administration in the outpatient department, and to upgrade the main foyer at North Devon District Hospital.

A learning culture

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust has one of the strongest safety reporting cultures in the country, according to a 2009 report from the National Patient Safety Agency.

Each year, the National Patient Safety Agency publishes feedback on the number of patient safety incident reports for each NHS Trust in England and Wales – and the more meticulously hospitals record incidents, the stronger their action plans.

Between April 2009 and March 2010, the Trust reported 4,206 incidents from which it could learn, in order to improve performance further. This is higher than the average for small acute trusts, reflecting the encouragement the Trust gives staff to report all incidents, so patient safety can be continually improved over time.

The Trust is also one of the fastest small trusts in the country to report incidents – it ranks fifth out of 32 small acute trusts for speed of reporting, with an average time of one month.

Patients and the public – your responsibilities:

NHS Constitution says:

- You should recognise that you can make a significant contribution to your own and your family's good health and wellbeing, and take some personal responsibility for it.
- You should register with a GP practice – the main point of access to NHS care.
- You should treat NHS staff and other patients with respect and recognise that causing a nuisance or disturbance on NHS premises could result in prosecution.
- You should provide accurate information about your health, condition and status.
- You should keep appointments, or cancel within a reasonable time. Receiving treatment within the maximum waiting times may be compromised unless you do.
- You should follow the course of treatment which you have agreed, and talk to your clinician if you find this difficult.
- You should participate in important public health programmes such as vaccination.
- You should ensure that those closest to you are aware of your wishes about organ donation.
- You should give feedback – both positive and negative – about the treatment and care you have received, including any adverse reactions you may have had.

Missed appointments

This year, patients failed to turn up for 7,960 appointments with Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust.

This means that, in each case, another patient was denied the chance to be seen more quickly. The cost of these missed appointments to our local hospitals was £709,000 in wasted staff time.

Telling us what you think

'Tell us what you think' feedback forms are available in all wards and public areas throughout the Trust's hospitals. We also gather feedback via our website, which includes comments areas and message boards.

This year we aim to introduce handheld computers and special kiosks so patients can give us feedback during their stay.

What you thought in 2009-10

Results from a national survey last year showed that Northern Devon Healthcare Trust continues to improve the experience of people using its out-patient service.

Meanwhile, the care at North Devon District Hospital is among the best in the country, according to a survey of in-patients published in 2010.

Nearly 500 people filled in detailed questionnaires about their stay as part of a national survey, carried out in 2009.

The hospital's doctors and nurses emerge particularly strongly in the survey by the Care Quality Commission, which oversees standards across the NHS.

According to our patients, waiting times for operations and other procedures put North Devon District Hospital not just in the best fifth of hospitals, but at the top of the entire NHS.

Overall, we were rated as being significantly above the NHS average in 11 areas, from choice of clinic appointments to patient involvement in decisions on care and treatment. We were not rated as being significantly worse than average in any area.

This made us the top-performing trust anywhere in Cornwall, Devon or Somerset.

Staff: your rights and NHS pledges to help you:

NHS Constitution says:

The rights are to help ensure that staff:

- Have a good working environment with flexible working opportunities, consistent with the needs of patients and with the way that people live their lives.
- Have a fair pay and contract framework
- Can be involved and represented in the workplace
- Have healthy and safe working conditions and an environment free from harassment, bullying or violence
- Are treated fairly, equally and free from discrimination
- Can raise an internal grievance and if necessary seek redress, where it is felt that a right has not been upheld.

Best in the South West for staff

The latest NHS staff survey shows high ratings at Northern Devon Healthcare Trust for personal appraisals and training – two of the critical elements in equipping employees to do their jobs well.

Ratings are also high for staff who say they have interesting jobs, who feel supported by their managers and who feel they can contribute towards improvements.

But staff also highlight the hazards of work-related stress and of violence and aggression from patients and relatives.

Overall, staff ranked Northern Devon among the best 20% of trusts in 12 areas out of 40.

Upholding staff rights

The Trust has robust policies in place to ensure that equal opportunities are upheld. Our grievance procedure allows staff to raise formally any concern that their rights have not been upheld.

Dealing with violence and aggression

The Trust encourages staff to report all incidents of violence and aggression, both physical or verbal, and whether major or minor.

This approach has helped make us the highest-reporting trust among organisations of similar size – for all incidents, not just violence and aggression.

The great majority of incidents result in no harm or minimal harm.

To help staff defuse potentially violent situations, we are investigating additional training on conflict resolution.

The NHS commitments:

NHS Constitution says:

The NHS commits to:

- Provide all staff with clear roles and responsibilities and rewarding jobs for teams and individuals that make a difference to patients, their families and carers and communities.
- Provide all staff with personal development, access to appropriate training for their jobs and the line management support to succeed.
- Provide support and opportunities for staff to maintain their health, wellbeing and safety.
- Engage staff in decisions that affect them and the services they provide, individually, through representative organisations and through local partnership working arrangements. All staff will be empowered to put forward ways to deliver better and safer services for patients and their families.

Collective negotiation

During 2009-10, the Trust undertook a major consultation exercise with staff working on 24-hour, seven-day shift patterns.

As a result of a joint agreement, negotiated collectively with the unions, the Trust will introduce new working arrangements and shift patterns during 2010.

The changes mean that staff working patterns, which have developed in different ways over the years, will more closely reflect the needs of our services and our patients.

The arrangements will also give all staff equal opportunity to be considered for flexible hours or fixed patterns of working.

We've also consolidated our system for standardised breaks for all staff, to ensure no-one is treated unfairly.

Staff wellbeing

During 2009, the Trust introduced a number of initiatives to support staff wellbeing.

For example, we sent all of our staff a leaflet about how to recognise signs of stress in themselves and their colleagues – and what steps we can all take to tackle it.

Working well

In 2009, our Staff Working Well group set up dedicated resources to help staff achieve healthy lifestyles. These included a special deal with Weightwatchers and a personal health management package, available for free over the internet.

Staff responsibilities:

NHS Constitution says:

- You have a duty to accept professional accountability and maintain the standards of professional practice as set by the appropriate regulatory body applicable to your professional role.
- You have a duty to take reasonable care of health and safety at work for you, your team and others, and to co-operate with employers to ensure compliance with health and safety requirements
- You have a duty to act in accordance with the express and implied terms of your contract of employment.
- You have a duty not to discriminate against patients or staff and adhere to equal opportunities and equality and human rights legislation.
- You have a duty to protect the confidentiality of personal information that you hold unless to do so would put anyone at risk of significant harm.
- You have a duty to be honest and truthful in applying for a job and in carrying out that job.

Effective staff induction

In 2009, we overhauled our induction process for new staff. Under the new process, all staff receive relevant training in patient confidentiality, health and safety and other professional and legal responsibilities.

Meanwhile, our rolling programme of compulsory e-learning ensures that all existing staff keep up to date with requirements.

Doing the rounds

We started a rolling programme last year for executive directors to make regular walkarounds, checking on safety issues and talking with staff about any problems they face and suggestions they might have. Following these visits, each area is supported in addressing actions to improve patient safety.

As well as tackling individual points, the programme has helped raise the profile of patient safety, underlining its fundamental importance to everything that we do.

Hand hygiene compliance

The Trust monitors hand-hygiene at ward level, to make sure staff continue to take the basic precautions against transmission of infection. Compliance at the end of last year was around 97%.

Staff responsibilities:

NHS Constitution says:

Staff should aim to:

- Maintain the highest standards of care and service, taking responsibility not only for the care you personally provide, but also for your wider contribution to the aims of your team and the NHS as a whole.
- Take up training and development opportunities provided over and above those legally required of your post.
- Play your part in sustainably improving services by working in partnership with patients, the public and communities.
- Be open with patients, their families, carers or representatives, including if anything goes wrong; welcoming and listening to feedback and addressing concerns promptly and in a spirit of co-operation. You should contribute to a climate where the truth can be heard and the reporting of, and learning from, errors is encouraged.
- View the service you provide from the standpoint of a patient, and involve patients, their families and carers in the services you provide, working with them, their communities and other organisations and making it clear who is responsible for their care.

Award-winning teams

Controlling infection

Fiona Baker, the Trust's Lead Nurse for Infection Control, was part of a team which won a national award for combating infections.

The team, led by South West Ambulance Service Trust, won first place in the Infection Control and Hygiene category in a new national awards scheme run by the Nursing Times and Health Service Journal.

The judging panel described their submission as 'a clear winner'.

The work on the submission was started 18 months ago by South West Ambulance Trust's Adrian South, with Fiona working on plans for the next phase – getting best practice in infection control throughout the ambulance service in the South West.

Safer births

The maternity service at Northern Devon Healthcare Trust has been selected from over 50 applicants to join a national network for best practice in safe births. The Safer Births Network is an initiative from The King's Fund.

Following a rigorous selection process, the Trust was one of just 12 successful applicant trusts across England and is the only representative from the South West region.

The Trust's work will go on to inspire other trusts across England under the programme.

Awards for paediatric nurses

Two paediatric nurses were honoured by the Paul Lock Memorial Fund last year.

Senior staff nurses Jan Braund and Jenny Birch both received awards from the scheme, which sets out to enhance the training and development of medical students, junior doctors and nursing staff in paediatrics.

The fund was set up in 2007 in memory of Paul Lock, a junior doctor at North Devon District Hospital.

Jan Braund received this year's Paul Lock Memorial Prize for her work in establishing a paediatric high dependency service and paediatric 'early warning score'.

Jenny Birch was nominated for the first Paul Lock Memorial Award for Lifetime Achievement.