

TITLE	Future commissioning of NHS Hydrotherapy services in Berkshire West
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 January 2021
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Katie Summers, Operations Director – Wokingham (Berkshire West CCG)

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Berkshire West CCG Governing Body met on the 8th December 2020 following the conclusion of a 12 week consultation on the future of Hydrotherapy services in Berkshire West.

Following careful analysis of the consultation feedback, clinical evidence, value for money and the ongoing operational challenges Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust face in running and maintaining the pool Berkshire West Governing Body reached the following consensus :

- i. Approved the recommendation that hydrotherapy is a not routinely funded treatment due to a lack of clinical benefit. Individual funding requests (IFR) may be made by the requesting clinician to the CCG for consideration, where exceptional circumstances exist.
- ii. Agreed to the requirement to develop the clinical criteria for providing NHS hydrotherapy in exceptional circumstances and the contractual mechanism for doing so and cost of providing any future service;
- iii. Agreed that the Chair and Accountable Officer of the CCG formally notifies all providers and the three Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees of the Governing Body’s decisions in writing;
- iv. Agreed to communicate with patients and other stakeholders to explain the outcome of the Governing Body meeting and the likely implications of the decisions made.

RECOMMENDATION

Health overview and scrutiny note the decision taken by Berkshire West CCG Governing Body.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Hydrotherapy is the use of water in the treatment of different conditions, including arthritis, muscular skeletal and neurological conditions. Hydrotherapy differs from swimming because it involves special exercises completed in a pool with a physiotherapist, with the water temperature at 33-36C, which is warmer than a typical swimming pool. Hydrotherapy is a specialist service provided to a small number of patients for a limited period as part of their rehabilitation. Patients in Berkshire West are referred following a physiotherapy assessment and will normally be prescribed a course of up to 6 sessions. In Berkshire West NHS hydrotherapy services are provided as part of the physiotherapy service within the main Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

(RBFT) contract with the CCG. Berkshire West commissions circa 107,000 physiotherapy appointments per annum (across acute and community settings), of which a very small number, approximately 1800, or 1.2% represent hydrotherapy. The service is used by approximately 300 patients per annum at a cost of £240,000 per year.

It was agreed in July 2020 by the Berkshire West CCG Governing Body that a 12 week public consultation should be undertaken to seek a broad range of stakeholder views in order to help inform the CCG in determining whether it should continue commissioning hydrotherapy services for NHS funded patients. The consultation was prompted by the need to review the clinical evidence for hydrotherapy, value for money, and the ongoing operational challenges that have intensified by the infection control challenges COVID has brought in terms of service delivery (pool closure).

The scope of this paper, the consultation and the associated Governing Body decision is limited to hydrotherapy services for NHS patients (those referred by a Physiotherapist or consultant), from RBFT using NHS funding from the CCG. It does not cover hydrotherapy services funded by Local Authorities or other agencies including schools. It also does not cover other agencies that may utilise the pool through non-NHS arrangements. The Governing Body should note that there is a separate, discrete cohort of the population which uses the RBFT hydrotherapy pool facility on a privately funded basis which many of the comments in the consultation relate to.

The consultation commenced on the 10th August 2020 and concluded on the 2nd November 2020. There were 498 individual responses to the survey as well as 9 additional full written responses from organisations representing patients. It should also be noted that wider engagement with the 3 chairs of the Local Authority Health, Overview and Scrutiny Committees took place alongside local MPs and other stakeholder groups.

There are four points to highlight that became evident on analysis of the responses:

1. Of the 496 online responses, 34 IP addresses were used more than once to submit a survey, one of which was used 28 times (the 34 IP addresses totalled 166 of the 498 responses). This could be due to multiple responses from one person or one person submitting responses on behalf of others.
2. Of this total number of responses, only a 59 (12%) identified as being a NHS patient who had been prescribed hydrotherapy by a clinician.
3. The majority of the comments in the survey responses refer to use of the pool at RBFT via voluntary sector organisations that commission sessions separately at the pool, and not the NHS provided service.
4. The benefits and value placed on hydrotherapy by those who responded.

The CCG has a duty to continually ensure limited NHS resources are spent prudently and that the services we commission are evidence based, and offer clinical benefit to the maximum number of people. The CCG regularly review Procedures of Limited Clinical value (PLCV), this is a procedure where the clinical effectiveness of that procedure is either absent or evidence shows weak efficacy. Whilst there are patient reported benefits arising from the use of hydrotherapy there remains a lack of definitive clinical evidence that points to any benefits over and above land-based physiotherapy. There is a limited amount of good quality evidence on the clinical effectiveness of hydrotherapy and randomised controlled trials (RCTs) compared with land-based physiotherapy show no difference in effectiveness on outcomes of function and pain for

patients with osteoarthritis, idiopathic arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, back pain, fibromyalgia, haemophilia, Parkinson's disease or rehabilitation following stroke. NICE does not recommend the use of hydrotherapy over conventional physiotherapy for any indications.

Based on the clinical effectiveness, value for money and analysis of the consultation, the Governing Body members are requested to approve Option 3b to not routinely fund NHS hydrotherapy services apart from on an exceptionally basis via an Individual Funding Request (IFR). This Option has been recommended after robust evaluation against the decision making principles, it allows the consideration of an individual's need and an assessment of benefits that hydrotherapy could deliver against a set list of criteria. This also ensures we remain aligned with our Integrated Care System partners (Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire) and other NHS Commissioners as hydrotherapy is not universally provided throughout the NHS for these client groups.

Background

The hydrotherapy service at RBFT caters for those who are directly referred for physiotherapy by their GPs, consultants within the hospital or other Allied Health Professionals (AHPs). Sessions have traditionally been allocated for certain services, regardless of their usage levels. Hydrotherapy is one modality of physiotherapy and it is reported that in the main benefits a very small number of patients requiring physiotherapy.

The provision of hydrotherapy has been under discussion for some time, attracting public interest after a decision was taken by RBFT to close the facility in 2016/17 which was subsequently withdrawn.

Timeline of activity to date includes:

- **June 2016:** RBFT's Senior Management Team approved a paper recommending the discontinuation of the hydrotherapy services and closure of the pool.
- **January 2017:** RBFT agreed to a review of the proposal to close the pool.
- **January 2017– June 2017:** A number of patient representative meetings were held as part of the review including MPs and patient representatives.
- **June 2017:** agreement by RBFT to closure was deferred in the face of public concern pending further stakeholder engagement (internal and external).
- **December 2017-February 2018:** RBFT planned closure of the pool for refurbishment agreed with the CCG.
- **Further closures during 2018:** primarily as a result of the boiler failing, with secondary equipment issues impacting on utilisation and associated running costs.
- **February 2018** – External stakeholder meeting hosted by Chief Executive, RBFT
- **June 2018** – Questionnaire sent to RBFT staff to seek clinical opinion on hydrotherapy services
- **June 2018** – Information collated on hydrotherapy complaints and safety risks

- **June 2018:** paper to RBFT Executive Management Committee agreeing a number of recommendations including:
 - Seeking a Berkshire West wide system review of the future of hydrotherapy in Berkshire West including consideration of alternative options and/or ceasing provision.
 - Short term work by RBFT to find ways to improve income/reduce loss
 - Collaborative work with commissioners to reinvigorate work with interested parties on the development of suitable alternative provision

- **December 2018** – Further engagement with local MPs led by RBFT
- **October 2019** – Internal RBFT stakeholder meeting with clinicians who either refer to hydrotherapy or provide the service.
- **March 2020:** The pool located on the RBH site is closed due to COVID infection control policy and is likely to remain this way for a considerable period of time.
- **July 2020** – Chairs of Health Overview and Scrutiny committee across Berkshire West, local MPs and RBFT informed of CCG consultation.
- **August – November 2020:** 12 week public consultation by the CCG on the future commissioning of hydrotherapy Services. 498 survey responses received, stakeholder meetings held.
- **November 2020** – CCG met with Health Overview and Scrutiny chairs (post

consultation closure) to outline key messages from the consultation as well as the implications and confirm next steps in the process.

Analysis of Issues

There is a limited amount of good quality evidence on the clinical effectiveness of hydrotherapy. For Paediatrics and neuro-rehabilitation there is some evidence to suggest that there are clinical benefits of hydrotherapy and for patients who are unable to stand independently this can be more beneficial than land-based therapies. The evidence suggests that for patients presenting with total hip and knee replacements and multiple fractures there is some clinical benefit. However, this benefit is no greater than alternative land-based interventions such as exercise groups in the gym and manual therapy. Consequently, hydrotherapy is not universally provided throughout the NHS for these client groups and is more often than not based on whether there is a suitable pool in the local area or not.

Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of hydrotherapy compared with land-based physiotherapy show no difference in effectiveness on outcomes of function and pain for patients with osteoarthritis, idiopathic arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, back pain, fibromyalgia, haemophilia, Parkinson's disease or rehabilitation following stroke. There is some low quality evidence which suggests that hydrotherapy may be better than conventional physiotherapy for rehabilitation in patients following hip or knee replacement. For other indications, there are no RCTs of hydrotherapy versus land-based physiotherapy. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) does not recommend the use of hydrotherapy over conventional physiotherapy for any indications (a full list of references can be found in in the main body of the report).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

N/A

Cross-Council Implications

N/A

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

Berkshire West CCG – Governing Body paper 8th December

Appendix 1a – Survey results

Appendix 3 – Equalities impact assessment – Stage 1 and Stage 2

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