

Friday 27 March 2020

Surge Plans for COVID-19

The Northern Trust has confirmed that plans for the 'surge' phase of COVID-19, where the number of positive cases is expected to rise considerably to a reach a peak around mid-May, are evolving all the time to take account of predicted requirements for critical care facilities.

Dr Seamus O'Reilly, Medical Director in the Northern Trust said:

"As has already been indicated, Northern Ireland will require significantly more critical care capacity than is currently available. This is actively being considered at a regional level.

Although there has been considerable modelling done within the Trust to look at how we might maximise available critical care capacity within our own hospitals, it would be premature for us to say anything more at this point given that things could change very quickly."

The Trust is also prioritising its resources to support the most vulnerable in the community. This has involved reviewing all Domiciliary Provision with families to identify what care they are able to provide for their relatives in these exceptional and very challenging times. This should free up domiciliary capacity to focus on those who require critical care which cannot be met by any other means during this COVID-19 period.

Commenting, Phil Hughes, the Trust's Director of Community Care said:

"We will work with families to arrange for contingency placements in care homes on a temporary basis for individuals where there is concern that the level of frailty and risk would indicate that this is the most appropriate way to provide care during this period or where the current care arrangements are unable to be sustained.

We are also working to increase capacity in the community or care placements within our own community hospitals and residential units, in addition to working with the care home sector.

The stepping down of non-critical interventions is allowing us to free up capacity of community nurses, social workers, care staff and Allied Health Professionals."

The Trust has also been working in partnership with GPs in primary care to set up COVID-19 Centres as part of a network across the region to manage the increased

incidence of Coronavirus cases in the community. New centres will open in Antrim, Ballymena and Coleraine and the emphasis will be on patient safety, staff safety and the provision of a sustainable primary care service.

The new centres will not be testing facilities and will only be for patients who are very unwell, are suspected of having COVID-19 and require medical attention. Patients will not be able to report directly to these centres without being referred by their GP or Out of Hours provider.

The Centres will help to free up GP services to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst balancing the need for primary care services to continue with the minimum of disruption.