

The Chartwell Ward at Risk: Staff Perspectives

In this week's edition of The Chartwell Cancer Trust's News Shopper series on local cancer care, current and former staff of the Chartwell Unit set out why they believe the inpatient ward should be protected: not only for the specialist clinical care it provides, but for the safety, familiarity and distinctive ward environment it offers patients at their most vulnerable.



Specialist local admission remains necessary for many patients

A minority of patients requiring the most intensive chemotherapy may benefit from receiving treatment at a tertiary centre such as King's College Hospital at Denmark Hill. But that does not remove the need for a specialist inpatient unit at PRUH.

The Chartwell Inpatient Ward is consistently full, mainly with haematology patients and some cancer patients. Many are being treated for complications of chemotherapy, including infection in immunocompromised patients, severe nausea and vomiting requiring intravenous fluids, or pain that cannot be managed safely at home. These patients are best cared for on a dedicated ward under the supervision of haematologists and specialist nursing staff.

Newly diagnosed patients with haematological malignancy are also often admitted as emergencies. They require urgent haematology input for assessment, investigations and, in some cases, immediate chemotherapy within the Chartwell Unit.

Patients already on treatment may also present urgently through A&E at PRUH due to escalating side effects. Under the new plans, they would then need to be moved to King's, potentially slowing access to urgent treatment. From previous experience, there have also been delays in this transfer process from PRUH to King's, which could prove detrimental.

Closing Chartwell as a dedicated cancer ward would have serious consequences for haematology and cancer patients who need specialist medical and nursing care. It would result in their dispersal across the hospital, including onto wards that are not equipped to manage their needs. Although patients may still be reviewed by haematology and oncology teams, they would not receive the same specialist nursing care, which may lead to less appropriate day-to-day management and delayed discharge, placing further pressure on inpatient beds.

Even now, haematology and cancer patients are sometimes placed on non-specialist wards. The proposals would greatly exacerbate this problem. It would be no different in principle from closing a cardiology or respiratory ward and expecting those patients to be absorbed safely elsewhere.

The ward should remain open for the majority of haematology and cancer patients who do not require the most intensive tertiary treatment, but who still need specialist inpatient care at PRUH.

Consultant Haematologist and former clinical lead at the Chartwell Unit

The loss of Chartwell would reach beyond haematology

I had the privilege of working on the Chartwell Inpatient Ward for several years, first as a staff nurse and junior sister, and later in a specialist haematology nursing role that brought me back to the ward regularly.

The Chartwell Ward has always been considered to be a specialist, high-quality care environment, but more than that, it is a safe haven for patients. Patients know that on the Chartwell Ward, they have access to specially trained nursing staff, senior haematology doctors, visiting oncology doctors, in close proximity to their chemotherapy unit and clinics.

I feel that the loss of inpatient beds on the Chartwell Ward is a far wider issue than haematology patients benefiting from advanced treatment at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill (many of whom access this already for clinical trials, stem cell transplants and CAR-T therapy). This move will affect all cancer patients who require care from a specialised unit with single-occupancy rooms – young patients, those with rare diagnoses, patients at end of life or others with particular treatment side effects that may be less well managed in general wards.

The haematology beds at Denmark Hill are already under considerable pressure, and PRUH patients may have long and detrimental waits to be admitted or transferred there for treatment.

I have grave concerns about the loss of the Chartwell beds and the impact on cancer inpatients. Without a plan for a dedicated cancer inpatient area at PRUH in the future, I believe that outcomes for this very specialised patient group may be negatively affected.

Former Chartwell staff nurse and junior sister; specialist haematology nurse

A ward built on kindness, familiarity and trust

I have been a member of staff on the Chartwell Unit since the day it opened, and over the years I have seen what this ward has meant to patients, relatives and staff alike. It is a place where people feel safe and cared for with dedication and compassion by exceptional, specialist nursing staff. We are more than a team here at Chartwell; we are a family.

Haematology and oncology nurses are special and not like nurses who work on general wards. Looking after these patients is an absolute privilege. We are with them at the beginning of their journey, when they are often frightened, and we see them through treatment and, we hope, safely home again.

What patients often remember about Chartwell is not only the kindness of the staff, but the fact that the ward feels calm, quiet, familiar and set up for their needs. Chartwell has always been much more than a ward people pass through. It is a specialist place of care that is deeply valued. A ward like this, once lost, cannot easily be replaced.

Long-serving member of staff at the Chartwell Unit

About The Chartwell Charities

The Chartwell Cancer Trust: Twenty Years at PRUH

Founded in 2005, The Chartwell Cancer Trust has supported oncology services at Princess Royal University Hospital for over two decades. It has funded senior consultant haematology posts and long-term nursing roles, investing over £1 million in staffing. The Trust has also refurbished treatment areas, purchased essential clinical equipment, and provides financial assistance for patients unable to meet costs associated with care.

The Chartwell Children's Cancer Trust: Supporting Children and Families Across the Region

Established in 2015, The Chartwell Children's Cancer Trust supports paediatric oncology units across South London, East Surrey and North Kent, including the Tony & Guy Ward at King's College Hospital, the Tiger Ward at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, the Rainbow Ward at Croydon University Hospital and the Children's Ward at The Royal Marsden.

It delivers ward refurbishments, upgrades clinical resources and leads major capital projects. Most notably, The Lily Pad Appeal raised £750,000 to create a new Oncology Ward at Croydon University Hospital – the largest single charitable donation in the hospital's history.

The charity also runs regular family support groups, maintains a respite lodge for families, provides AV1 "No Isolation" robots to keep children connected to school, and offers direct financial assistance during treatment.

The Proposed Changes to Inpatient Cancer Care at PRUH

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has been consulting on proposals to remove dedicated inpatient haematology cancer beds from Princess Royal University Hospital (PRUH) and centralise care at Denmark Hill. The formal engagement period has now closed.

The Trust will now review feedback, produce a report summarising themes and findings, and use this to inform the development of a final proposal.

Read the detail

The Trust's engagement briefing and FAQs can be read in full on the Chartwell website. Visit: www.chartwellcancertrust.co.uk/formal-engagement

Share your view

The Chartwell Cancer Trust continues to welcome testimony from the community. To share your experience or views, email: michaeldouglas@chartwellcancertrust.co.uk

The Chartwell Unit petition remains open. You can add your name to the Chartwell Unit petition by visiting <https://chnq.it/LScTzjXfFW> or using the QR code below.

