

The Reality of Losing Inpatient Cancer Care at PRUH



As the NHS engagement period on proposals to remove inpatient haematology cancer beds from PRUH draws to a close, The Chartwell Cancer Trust shares testimony from patients and families about what the Chartwell ward means to them. Their accounts illustrate the practical, emotional and clinical value of local inpatient cancer care: safety, continuity, proximity and family presence at moments of acute vulnerability.

Feeling safe enough to continue chemotherapy

I'm currently a patient on the Chartwell Ward and was heartbroken to hear there are plans to close it.

I was diagnosed with stage 3 Hodgkin lymphoma in August and had a rough start when I began chemotherapy and had to go to hospital with chest pains and shortness of breath. I had an awful eight-hour wait in A&E. It's hard enough waiting that long, but when you are immunocompromised, it adds a whole new level of fear. I was sent home, then had to return the next day with the same symptoms, only to be discharged again despite being in a lot of pain.

On the third day, my oncology team at PRUH pushed to get me admitted. I was placed on a medical ward overnight but discharged again the next day, even though I felt worse. I left, almost giving up entirely on coming back for chemotherapy. I didn't want to continue putting my trust in medical staff who were not listening to me.

Thankfully, the staff at Chartwell got me rebooked in, and it turned out I had an infection and needed antibiotics. During my 12-day stay, I received five-star care and support. They explained every part of my treatment, put my mind at ease, and gave me the courage to face the rest of my chemotherapy. I beg you, don't take this wonderful ward away from the vulnerable people who desperately need it in the worst moments of their lives.

Samantha Bennett, current Chartwell patient

With acute leukaemia, rapid access to treatment matters

As a former leukaemia inpatient of the Chartwell Unit, all I can say is that the care I received there was second to none and saved my life. From the moment I was diagnosed with APML leukaemia in December 2007, I received care, treatment and compassion of the highest calibre from the nursing team, the doctors and the wonderful consultants.

I was an inpatient for nearly four months and an outpatient for two years. During that time, my parents were able to visit me daily, providing enormous comfort through the most difficult period in my life. Without that support, my spirits would have dropped badly, and my recovery would have been harder.

My type of acute leukaemia meant that time was of the essence, as I could haemorrhage at any time. Not long after my admission, I developed a serious clotting and bleeding complication. From my local GP contacting me with erratic blood results to me getting to PRUH for urgent care was a matter of a couple of hours. If it had been Denmark Hill, this could have been five or six hours - enough time for me to miss a critical window of treatment.

Colin Parker, former Chartwell leukaemia patient

Daily visits were part of his care

My late husband was a patient of the Chartwell Unit at PRUH and received inpatient care on a number of occasions, particularly in the last months of his life.

I live in Sidcup, and it was a huge advantage that he was admitted to PRUH. Despite parking problems there, the site is reasonably accessible for me, so I could visit him daily and spend hours with him each day. This was not just a very great comfort to me, but I am sure it made a great deal of difference to him. Without those visits, I have no doubt he would have become very depressed indeed.

I simply could not have undertaken those visits to the King's site. I walk with an elbow crutch because of scoliosis, and since there is no parking there, I would not have been able to make the journey every day by public transport.

My husband was also able to see a consultant who knew him well, and one should not discount how important that is. The care at PRUH was first class, and the staff were very supportive to both of us.

June Slaughter, widow of former Chartwell patient Michael Slaughter

For some patients, the journey itself is physically too much

My cancer broke my back in two places, and I had to wear a body brace. I had sepsis a few years ago and spent two weeks in Chartwell Ward, where the care was amazing. For patients who are already so unwell, being made to travel to Denmark Hill is awful.

Heather Tait, current PRUH patient

Care at King's did not replace the need for Chartwell

Sadly, my husband died in December 2021 from multiple myeloma and sepsis. He was treated in the Chartwell Unit during the 20 years that he lived with the disease, although he also had two stem cell treatments at King's and was seen regularly at the clinic there. When he was particularly ill, he was admitted to the specialist ward within the Chartwell Unit.

It made a great difference that he was being looked after by specialist nurses in the Unit and consultants who knew him. It also made a big difference to me being able to travel reasonably quickly and conveniently to PRUH each day to see him, providing moral support, encouragement and company.

When we had to travel to King's, it was often a considerable struggle, especially when he had to be in a wheelchair. The journey could take several hours. I experienced that journey daily when he was there for stem cell treatment and, even for me as his carer, it was a slog. It would be much more difficult for someone older, less able, or still trying to hold down work alongside the stress of a serious illness.

Katrina Parsons, widow of former Chartwell patient

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://chnng.it/LScTZjXfFW> or using the QR code below.

