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Cathy Edwards
Director - Yorkshire & the Humber Specialised Commissioning Group
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Dear Cathy

Children's Congenital Heart Services

At the meeting of the North Yorkshire Scrutiny of Health Committee on 8 April 2011 we considered the consultation document on the proposed changes to Children's Congenital Heart Services. In view of what we feel are the special circumstances facing North Yorkshire in looking towards both Leeds and Newcastle as regional centres for this service we supported Option D but with the inclusion of Newcastle – in effect an "Option E".

On the basis of the information available to the Committee and using Option D as the starting point, patient flows under a new Option E would be:

	<u>Option D</u>	<u>Option E</u>
London	1,482	1,482
Birmingham	660	660
Bristol	420	420
Leeds	636	380 *
Liverpool	400	389 **
Newcastle	-	267 ***

* 636 - Carlisle (27) - Durham (26) - Darlington (31) - Newcastle Upon Tyne (97) - Sunderland (22) - Berwick on Tweed (2) - Middlesbrough (51).

** 400 - Lancaster (11).

*** Carlisle (27) + Durham (26) + Darlington (31) + Newcastle Upon Tyne (97) + Sunderland (22) + Berwick on Tweed (2) + Middlesbrough (51) + Lancaster (11).

In reaching this view we were mindful of the need for consultants to build up specialist expertise and that putting in place a critical mass in a fewer number of locations will lead nationally to a service which is sustainable in the long term. But we feel these factors must be tempered by the need to take into account geographical considerations and the risks to children being transported large distances. For instance, if Leeds were to close, a child born with a congenital heart defect in Hull faces a journey of 144 miles to the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle, a child from Wakefield faces a journey of 111 miles and a child from Leeds faces a journey of 99 miles. These are also huge distances for the relatives and guardians wanting to visit children.

In terms of building viable units at both Newcastle and Leeds we feel there are a number of other factors that could be explored.

Firstly with regard to Newcastle if the possibility of directing some patients to Newcastle from the Scottish borders is explored and if the fact that Newcastle provides children's heart transplant surgery is fully taken into account, we feel there could sufficient case in favour of that unit being retained. With regard to Leeds we feel it is essential that its regional population is taken into account. For instance, between 2011 and 2033 the number of children up to 9 years of age in the region is planned to increase from 623,500 to 696,100 - an increase of 11.6%. This would bridge the shortfall. We also feel the centre's accessibility, its co-location of children's and adult cardiac surgery on one site and the strength of the clinical network that has been established for paediatric congenital heart disease must be given sufficient weighting so the service is not lost.

Secondly we feel there is still a debate taking place across the NHS about whether or not the 400 threshold figure is actually a robust figure and also whether or not the scoring methodology underpinning the options sufficiently takes into account all relevant factors. Unfortunately because the consultation with overview and scrutiny committees is only taking place at a regional level we have not had the opportunity to examine these issues in detail.

Against this background we feel there are sufficient uncertainties to suggest that in actual fact that case for retaining all 3 centres in the North is more finely balanced than first appears. We strongly urge, therefore, that before any final decision is made on this matter the scoring methodology, the threshold figure of 400 and the inherent risks in transporting seriously ill children across large distances are reviewed to ensure all relevant factors and options for the service are fully explored. We need to be reassured.

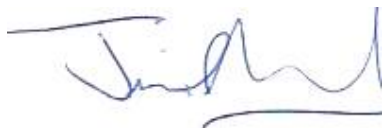
On behalf North Yorkshire Scrutiny of Health Committee I would be grateful if you would take these points into consideration when reaching your final decision.

As a member of the Yorkshire and Humber Joint Committee I hope to have an opportunity to discuss these issues in more detail at its next meeting.

Finally for ease of reference for the recipients of this letter the actual consultation document on the review of Children's Congenital Heart Services can be accessed via the link below:

http://www.specialisedservices.nhs.uk/safe_sustainable/public-consultation-2011

Yours sincerely



County Councillor Jim Clark
Chair: North Yorkshire County Council Scrutiny of Health Committee

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