

MEDIA RELEASE AND VIDEO TOUR

Refurbished ward area improves care for frail and elderly patients at Royal Lancaster Infirmary

A new high spec ward area has been created at the Royal Lancaster Infirmary (RLI) to improve the care of frail and elderly patients with conditions such as dementia and confusion.

Former Wards 4 and 5 in Medical Unit 1 of the RLI have been remodelled to extremely high and exacting standards by innovative maintenance engineers from the Estates Team at the RLI.

University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust (UHMBT) started work on the new ward area in November 2020 and it is now fully up and running.

There are 24 beds and three day rooms in the new ward area, and it has private rooms, small bays and communal areas in colours that can be easily recognised by patients with dementia or similar conditions.

The availability of single rooms means that any patients who need to be isolated for infection prevention or other reasons, can be safely cared for. Every room has toilet facilities which also makes life more comfortable and dignified for patients.

Another major improvement to the ward area is that there is an impressive air handling unit which provides ten air changes an hour. This is a huge improvement in terms of infection prevention and air quality for patients and staff. The fully compliant air handling unit - which was designed by Andy Langley, an electrical engineer from the Estates Team - conditions and purifies 5,500 litres of air per second.

There is also a built-in monitoring system that automatically tests the emergency lighting in the new ward area every week and sends a report directly to the Estates Team managers.

Luke Oldland, Capital Project Lead, Steve Gargan, Building Manager and Russ Stephenson, Fire Safety Advisor from the Estates Team at UHMBT, worked on the project in partnership with Emma Fitton, Deputy Associate Director of Nursing for Medicine, Mel Wolfall, Associate Director of Nursing and Dianne Smith, Dementia Matron for UHMBT.

Luke said: "We've built fantastic new facilities for patients in what was probably the most challenging area of the hospital."

“It has been great to have the opportunity to do this and we have designed everything in partnership with clinicians. We believe this is now one of the best in-patient facilities in the entire hospital for older and frail patients.

“A huge amount of engineering skill has gone into the development, especially the air handling unit designed by Andy Langley from our team. Andy has done an outstanding job on it, especially in the design of the building management system that controls it.”

Luke, Steve and the team worked with Dianne, Emma and Mel on designing the facilities to support the care of people living with dementia and other conditions. Large movable screens with colourful and attractive images of parks, cafes, the seaside and familiar places have been created to make patients feel more at home in the communal areas.

Estates and Facilities staff from other NHS Trusts have visited the RLI to look at the project and have been full of praise for what the RLI Estates Team has achieved.

Emma said: “We have created a wonderful, dementia-friendly ward area with a vastly improved environment for our patients and staff.

“The individual rooms and bays provide greater dignity and a calm environment for our patients. Everything has been designed with the needs of people living with dementia in mind. For example, the toilet seats are red which makes it easier for people with dementia to recognise. The rooms are all colour coded which will also make life easier for people with dementia.

“We now have some really nice open areas where our new Activity Coordinator can keep patients entertained with crafts, knitting, games and other activities. There are electronic bed boards (information screens) at every bed so that staff can do e-observations (medical assessments) at patients’ bedsides. The new development also has an end of life suite to enable relatives to stay with their loved ones when necessary.

“In addition, we have built an attractive changing area and showers for staff which we hope will improve the wellbeing of our colleagues.”

In line with UHMBT’s current priorities, quality and safety have been paramount as has the wellbeing of staff during the design and build.

Dianne Smith said: “The colour-themed bays and rooms are to aid orientation for patients with confusion and short-term memory problems to find their bed areas.

“The coloured toilet furniture provides a contrast for improved visibility to ensure patients’ safety. Picture signage is in place for orientation to toilets and the day room for patients with cognitive impairment and dementia as the pictures are easy to recognise and understand in comparison to words.”

Every bed head in the new ward area has two separate electrical supplies from two different areas so there would still be a supply if one of the sources was failing to operate. There are USB charging points next to the beds and the walls are lined with plywood so that if a wall or equipment is damaged, it can be easily repaired.

As Medical Unit 1 is a listed building, bespoke sash windows have been installed to retain the original character of the hospital.

Luke, who has worked at the Trust for 10 years, added: "I think the project has been a resounding success. I would also like to thank all of the Trust teams and our local specialist contractors who made it all possible during the construction and commissioning phases.

"Our Estates Team and specialist sub-contractors include some of the hardest working people I've ever met in my life. It's a team that really does care about patients. Everyone works with the shared goal of keeping patients as safe as possible and to give patients and staff the best possible experience. This really shines through at all times."

To watch a video tour of the new ward area, please click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI5bBPyKagU>

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