

Pathology Update for Our Healthier South East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 This paper is to update the Our Healthier South East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) on progress made since these changes were discussed with JHOSC on 22/07/2019. The paper presented at that committee is available from page 43 of the [JHOSC papers 22/07/21](#).
- 1.2 It is important to note that these developments will mean no change to the service received by patients or the service provided to GPs.
- 1.3 The changes to local pathology service were driven by a national directive issued in 2017. This directive was that each Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP), now known as an Integrated Care System (of which we were one of 44 at that time) was to create a local pathology network across providers.
- 1.4 The local network was to comprise of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust (GSTT), King's College Hospital (KCH) NHS Foundation Trust, Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust (LGT), South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM), Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and the GP Direct Access pathology which was commissioned by all six former south east London Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs); note that this was before the six CCGs merged to become NHS South East London CCG in April 2020.
- 1.5 In late 2018 Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust decided not to be part of the SEL Pathology Network and the procurement and has, instead, developed a pathology network with Barts Health NHS Trust and Homerton University NHS Trust, and in July 2020 agreed a full business case to develop a network with Barts Health and Homerton (with outline business case in Nov 2019). The new network will go live from May 2021, and it will continue to provide pathology services, working within its new network and continue to have labs on both the QEH and UHL sites.
- 1.6 The LGT Board recognises the close clinical links between LGT and the other trusts in SEL, especially the role of GSTT and KCH as specialist ("tertiary") referral centres for patients (particularly when tests for cancer are needed). The Trust has continued to work with ICS partners and the SEL Pathology Programme Board to ensure that these clinical links are not negatively affected by joining a pathology network outside SEL. When rapid patient diagnosis of pathology samples is needed, for example, for haemato-oncology, LGT will continue to refer samples to the local tertiary centre in SEL.
- 1.7 There was no requirement for a public consultation as there is no change to pathology services from the point of view of patients. The only difference is which laboratory is

used for processing samples. The quality of service will be maintained and the CCG's contract with King's College NHS Foundation Trust and Guys & St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust will ensure this is so.

1.8 In September 2020, the procurement process had concluded, and the Governing Body of NHS South East London CCG made the decision, on the basis of best value, to confirm that it would commission all direct access GP pathology activity from King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, who will work with their newly procured laboratory partner Synlab from April 2021. The Governing Body meeting was held in public and the papers can be downloaded from [here](#).

1.9 Whilst the NHS South East London CCG's decision on the commissioning of GP Direct Access services was driven by a best value assessment there are also important non-financial benefits associated with the new contract. The Synlab bid was the highest scoring qualitative bid received by the network and proposed the strongest service offering for primary care. These specific benefits for GPs and other community based services will include:

- Fast tracking of urgent GP requests to support the prevention of hospital admissions and enable more patient conditions to be managed within the community
- Community services to benefit from improvements in consistency, reliability and flexibility of services, including collection arrangements, electronic ordering and access to a GP hotline
- A dedicated queue for urgent GP requests via the online phlebotomy booking system
- New, integrated Information Technology (IT) systems to link laboratories and referral sites, providing easier, faster access to testing services for clinicians in hospitals and the community
- Real-time logistics dashboards to bring the visibility and tracking of tests that primary care users do not currently have.

1.10 In terms of bidders, the opportunity to tender for the pathology service was widely publicised, and ultimately the role of the CCG was to consider the applications it received. The direct access pathology for Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham GP services will transfer from LGT to the joint venture with KCH and GSTT in the autumn of 2021, and the CCG is working with partners to ensure the transition is smooth.

2.0. Update

2.1 A Transition and Transformation Pathology Programme Board has been established with a robust programme structure and dedicated resources to oversee the implementation plan. This will cover the key workstreams, including finance, IM&T, GP direct access, operations/governance, clinical governance & quality, research and development, estates, workforce, and stakeholder engagement & communications. The CCG will be actively involved in the programme, and Neil Kennett-Brown, Place Based Director Greenwich, is the Senior Responsible Owner for SEL CCG. All parties are

committed to working together.

- 2.2 In the months following establishment of the NHS/SYNLAB partnership on 1 April 2021, existing acute and direct access GP services, presently operated by Viapath, will continue to operate as they do now for GPs and patients (requesting/getting tests/receiving results). There will be no immediate changes for GPs, and no initial requirement to do anything differently as a result of the new partnership. For any changes in the future, there will be timely notification and opportunity for general practice input.
- 2.3 Direct access GP services in Bromley, Lambeth and Southwark will see no immediate change at all as their current providers – GSTT and KCH – are not changing, though their laboratory partner changed from Viapath to Synlab on 01/04/21.
- 2.4 Direct access GP services in Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham are expected to transfer from Lewisham & Greenwich NHS Trust to the partnership in autumn 2021, with planning already underway, working with the Trust, SYNLAB and general practice.
- 2.5 The NHS/SYNLAB partnership are working with stakeholders to develop these plans to ensure a safe transfer of service, again aiming to ensure continuity for GPs and patients.
- 2.6 The partnership's vision is to co-develop a world-leading, integrated pathology network which supports high quality patient care for residents of south east London and beyond. The service will be clinically led, with the needs of patients and service users at its heart.
- 2.7 In addition to services provided by the two NHS partner trusts (KCH and GSTT) and GP services, the partnership will also provide NHS pathology services to many clinics, mental health and community services, including those provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust.
- 2.8 As joint owners of the new partnership, the two NHS Trusts (KCH and GSTT) will set the strategic direction of pathology services, which will continue to benefit from the expertise of present pathology staff, including those working for Viapath and a small number of NHS pathology staff who will transfer. With respect to delivery and improvement of services, SYNLAB has a successful track record of partnering with the NHS and other hospitals across Europe to enable large-scale transformation.
- 2.9 SYNLAB and NHS partners plan to develop a 'hub and spoke' pathology model in accordance with the national NHS clinical vision and strategy. This will see significant improvements made to the quality and accessibility of testing and diagnostic services, which in turn will enable more rapid diagnosis, better patient outcomes, and an improved experience for clinicians and other service users.
- 2.10 The NHS/SYNLAB partnership has agreed an ambitious programme to transform pathology services over the next four years, resulting in major improvements to the quality of patient care and to the experience of clinicians providing that care. Central to this transformation, which directly responds to the national clinical vision for the NHS, is the creation of a hub laboratory which will be based in the community. This new

laboratory will be purpose-built with access to state-of-the art facilities and equipment, and supported by a central IT system which will allow clinicians to order, track and access test results online. Existing processes to enable the fast tracking of urgent requests will be enhanced. As well as improving patient and clinician experience, these improvements will help clinicians to manage care in the community, preventing avoidable visits and admissions to hospital. Within the first year of the new partnership, plans for service transformation will be finalised with the involvement of GPs and other clinicians from across the south east London health and care system.

2.11 The location of the future hub laboratory has now been confirmed as Friars Bridge Court, 41-45 Blackfriars Road, SE1 8NZ. The building was chosen based on a range of key criteria, including distance from the various NHS organisations it will serve and its ability to house modern pathology services which respond effectively to the needs of the NHS across South East London. [About the hub laboratory.](#)