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The Okehampton Community Hospital Chronicle 2024

The

Okehampton Community Hospital Chronicle

was established as part of a local campaign to reopen 'dormant' wards at Okehampton Community Hospital.

The objective was to show that whilst consideration of health-care services is predicated on budgets, patient demand and workforce numbers everyone's experience of health-care is intensely personal.



We have edited some submissions for length or to anonymise names that might allow people to be identified. We have tried to ensure our edits are appropriate and sympathetic to the original. If we have failed in this we apologise. We are tremendously grateful to all who have taken the time to share their memories with us.

My memory is about visiting a friend at Okehampton Hospital

" I had a lovely friend who was dying of cancer and in the final stages of care in the Okehampton hospital. Her husband was with her and it was obvious he was given as much respect as his wife. I was there to say goodbye in a peaceful and never to be forgotten haven of Love. I went on three protests and particularly remember a woman saying how furious she was that the maternity department was closing because she had had the best birthing care and hoped her daughter might have a baby there too one day!!

~ **J.W.** 2015

My memory is about visiting a friend at Okehampton Hospital

" I have a story which may illustrate the stupidity of not using the beds in our Hospital. I know a couple who live 8 miles from Okehampton. The husband had a Stroke about 3 weeks ago and was taken to RD&E. After some time it was decided that nothing further could be done and as the stroke ward was full it was suggested to his wife that they move him to Axminster Hospital! She does not drive and had been taking the bus into Exeter every day to see him. The prospect of having to travel to Axminster was out of the question. In the event the man sadly died a few days ago. How much nicer for her and more convenient for RD&E if he could have been moved to Okehampton.

~ C.Y.

2024

My memory is about visiting a friend at Okehampton Hospital

"On the 2 or 3 occasions visiting (usually) elderly friends who were recuperating and had been moved from the Exeter RD&E. They were **SO** happy to be nearer home, in an appropriately non tertiary hospital atmosphere and able to be more frequently visited by family and friends. Without doubt their recovery was made more rapid.

~ **R.G.** 2015/16/17

I have a few memories to share of loved ones, both family & friends. My Mum was in her 87th year and had spent the last few years in 'Lakeside Residential Carehome', where she was wonderfully looked after as her crippling arthritis eventually left her bed-bound. With her body failing, she was admitted to Okehampton Hospital, for the last week of her life. The doctors and nurses were so compassionate and understanding, they placed Mum in a room to herself, overlooking the garden. She had always been a keen advocate of the Zen Garden that is in the hospital grounds well-being and mindfulness were very much on the radar of the late Dr. Neilson, who was a key part of the new hospital being built. ... I was extremely close to my Mum and in those last days I spent day and night in the hospital with her. The nurses even put a reclining bed/chair for me to sleep by her, and so I did holding her hand as she slipped away from this life. They not only allowed my Mum a caring and dignified passing, but also supported me through what was the saddest time of my life. A large hospital cannot by its very nature cope with the more one-to-one requirements of the elderly. At a time when one is at the most vulnerable, it was such a blessing to be able to be in such surrounds.

I also spent time there with our dear neighbours, a devoted couple in their nineties. When at last A... was too poorly to be at home with the end of life care, he and E... were both admitted to Okehampton Hospital. She was fast deteriorating as well, but she was able to be by his side as he passed away and she was surrounded by the nursing staff, who greatly comforted her and administered to her needs. E... never managed to go home again. She spent a couple of months in the same Carehome as my Mum and joined her beloved A... soon after. I cannot stress the point strongly enough the importance of a local hospital providing the correct tier of care needed that a major surgical hospital cannot. Not only does it alleviate the additional pressure of bed blocking, it is far more kind and appropriate for this level of care, and in providing for the rehabilitation of conditions. The removal of the council run Care and Rehabilitation, 'Wardhayes', was again a short sighted terrible loss of a tier of care in the local community.

Yes it is great when people can stay at home and be cared for, but when that is not possible and that is certainly the case for many, the smaller locally concentrated care in one place, helps continuity, monitoring and co-ordination of all aspects of looking after the welfare of those in need. Most of us will now have experienced the confusion and devastation of the elderly relative with dementia having to be placed in a mixed ward at a large hospital such as the RD&E. It is impossible for the frenetic activity in the average ward not to have a negative effect on both the patient and the relative or friend. I have experienced this with my elderly mother-in-law, who had to endure a month of this, suffering from dementia. It was a very upsetting time. Compared to when she was able to walk up to the hospital from North Street in Okehampton, to spend many hours daily with her late husband who was there for a couple of months, with complex needs - It was a million miles away from the 'care' that was available to her, years later at the RD&E. We are witnessing a disintegration of what was a fit-for-purpose network of care, help and support. It leaves us all to look forward to a system of isolation, fear and hopelessness for many. Unless we can reverse some of the reckless, short sighted decision making, it will only lead to more misery and eventually more expense.

~ S.T.

" I visited my lovely second mum there towards the end of her life and now I go there for my hearing aids! Age creeps up on us all.

~ S.D.

Must have been around 2011 or 2012



My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

" I was able to visit my mother daily while she was an inpatient at Okehampton hospital. She was very poorly after a stroke and received excellent care there until she was able to transfer to a care home.

~ A.H.

"My Dad is still in Exeter hospital, he is very poorly, in fact too poorly for surgery. A few years back he would have been transferred to Okehampton community hospital, so they could give him intravenous drugs and the care he needs. Once the drips were out he would have been transferred to Wardhayes or equivalent. He can't come home as he lives on his own, he can't come to me because of the stairs. Instead he is in the main hospital using a bed that someone else almost certainly needs. He is so far away and I can't go see him, I can't go and wave through the window as I would be able to if we hadn't lost our hospital and care homes.

~ **K.H.** 2017

My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

" My daughter gave birth to my grandson in 2004 in the beautiful maternity suite at Okehampton Hospital. She said the whole experience there was fantastic (she had my granddaughter two years earlier in Derriford) and made such a difference. Such a shame this amazing facility is no longer open.



My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

"My elderly mother was in Okehampton hospital for several months having been relocated from RD&E. She had advanced Alzheimers and was very difficult at times. The staff at Okehampton were so patient with her and her care couldn't have been better. She received a cuddly toy as a present from one of the cleaning staff and one of the nurses would take time out to sing with her. They'd let her sit in reception sometimes if she was lonely. Being so close to us it was easy for us to visit every day. Without Okehampton Hospital she would have been still in RD&E taking up a bed when she didn't need much medical intervention and it would have been harder to visit daily. I'm sorry that other families in our position don't have this remarkable resource.

~ C...

" My father spent his last few days in Okehampton Hospital, passing away in ... September 2004. The family was all able to be with him just prior to his passing.

~ J.G.

2004



My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

" My father was the penultimate patient before the hospital wards closed. Staff were kind and considerate. He was bed blocking in Exeter. His being in Okehampton saved a daily 50 mile round trip.

~ M.N.

2017

My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

" My grandson was born here 17 years ago. *Force*, the cancer charity, works here when staff are available . *Force* helped my wife when she was suffering from cancer.

~ M.B.

" My husband died in this hospital and it would have been awful if I had to go to Exeter!! And for my two sons.

~ C.G.



My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

" My late father-in-law often had to have in-bed care at the hospital also I know of some people who had end-of-life care in Okehampton.

~ S.H.



My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

"My late partner was in there with pneumonia about 15 years ago. I visited every afternoon, I couldn't have done this if he was at RD&E hospital as it takes hours there and back. I hope they do [re]open the wards as most elderly people do not have their own transport.

~ M.W.

My mum moved to live in South Zeal to be closer to me and her grandchildren after my Dad passed away. She had such good care from her GP, ..., and was a regularly admitted to the local hospital on the site where the health centre is now, where they gave her blood transfusions and monitored a change in her blood pressure medication. After serious surgery at the RD&E she spent several days recovering there where the care she received was second to none. Such kindness from all the staff and most of all in our local area. In her last year of life my Mum was in a local care home and admitted to the local hospital where she drew her last breath. Money collected in her memory was donated to the new hospital. Another memory of our local cottage hospital was whilst teaching at Okehampton College, students were frequently taken to the hospital in the first instance after an accident or medical incident. The staff there were always so helpful taking over the emergency and making the decision about the next step in their care. It was a life-line and cost effective, sometimes dealing with the incident without needing transport to Exeter.

~ A.R.

My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

" The birth of our 4th child - such a great experience in a 'smaller' hospital. with such attention from a friendly staff.

~ P.G.

My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

" They nursed my husband for end-of-life care and I spent 10 days recovering from an operation.

~ F.R.

" Visiting my Mother.

~ N.P.



My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

"Visiting my nan and grandad in hospital. When I visited my nan it was such a pleasant ward the staff were lovely. My nan had great care while she was at the hospital to receive rehabilitation

~ **H.S.**

My memory is about visiting a family member at Okehampton Hospital

"When my mother-in-law had a stroke (luckily not a serious one) she was admitted to the hospital. It meant that my husband and I could visit her daily as well as quite a few friends which helped a lot with her recovery and she was treated by her own local doctor and I am positive that because she was in a hospital locally this vastly speeded her recovery and her mental well being.

~ M.P.

Approx. 22 years ago

" After a very major operation for my bowel which left me with a bag for 6 months I was able to return to Okehampton Hospital where I was given the best care anyone could wish for, and my relations were able to visit me so that I could recover well.

~ S.H.



My memory is about my own stay at Okehampton Hospital

"After having my daughter at Exeter RD&E (due to being induced), I immediately came back to Okehampton Hospital for 2 nights. I honestly don't know how I would have survived motherhood if I had had to go straight home. The midwives were amazing and helped teach me so much about caring for my daughter, took her away so I could sleep and assisted with breastfeeding, which I probably would have given up on if I wasn't helped in this first few days.

~ P.K.

2016

My memory is about my own stay at Okehampton Hospital

Both of my children spent much of their early days in the Maternity Ward of the Community Hospital. It was a great service and a great start to their lives.

~ C.R.

" Came back to Okehampton maternity ward after having my children in Exeter.

~ F.S.

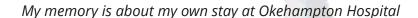
2006 and 2007



My memory is about my own stay at Okehampton Hospital

Following the difficult birth of my first son I stayed at Okehampton Hospital for a few days for care for myself and support with my baby in the maternity unit. I'm so grateful that in those days I could stay close to home and my husband was able to easily visit me and our new baby. I do feel for people in a similar situation now, who would have to stay in Exeter.

~ E.B.



" Having a child at the hospital. Also chemo plus the Minor Injuries Unit.

~ Y.J.

" Having been to the A&E multiple times as a young child and feeling scared, I was able to go to the Minor Injuries Unit at the Hospital for a nosebleed. They made me feel safe locally and a lot less stressed that at the RD&E when I was a child.

~ A.C.



My memory is about my own stay at Okehampton Hospital

"Having gone through Myeloma cancer over the last two years, I have had to have a lot of blood tests sent to Haematology at RD&E, so it was so simple to book into Okehampton Community Hospital bloodroom, where ... would take blood and send it on the regular NHS van service on a Tuesday or Thursday. Not only was it easier, but less pressure on Okehampton Medical Centre.

~ B.H.



My memory is about my own stay at Okehampton Hospital

Having lived in Okehampton all my life the hospital was a tremendous asset to the town. Aged 3, I fell down the stairs and cut my nose open, my mum scooped me up and carried me to the hospital where I was stitched up. No waiting around or having to ring ahead, just ring the doorbell, be admitted and treated by the wonderful staff. It never mattered what hour of the day or night you would be seen. This was in the 1960s. This service was just as good in the 1990s when my son perforated his eardrums, we arrived at 10pm to be seen by a Dr. on site who treated him and gave medication. At present the Minor Injuries Unit which was based at the hospital, and now on the East St Medical Centre site, is only operational Mon-Fri during the day, no cover at night or at the weekend which is appalling bearing in mind how much the town's population has exploded in recent years. Meaning a trip to Launceston, Tavistock or Exeter piling even more pressure on the overburdened services. That's assuming you have transport. My two children were born at the old memorial hospital in the 1980s and four of my grandchildren were born at the maternity unit on the present site.

" I had both my children in Okehampton Hospital

~ J.P.

over 40 years ago



My memory is about my own stay at Okehampton Hospital

" Maternity services during and after pregnancy

~ A.C. 2014 & 2019

My memory is about my own stay at Okehampton Hospital

" Memory of now retired GP Dr ... attending Minor Surgery. This out-of-hours treatment prevented prenatal septicaemia from progressing. Saving two lives.

~ S.S.

" Ringing the doorbell at 4.30 a.m. and managing to get into the maternity unit and gave birth in ten minutes! Thanks to the amazing midwives (baby no 4!)

~ C.R.



My memory is about being a member of the staff at the hospital

" I nursed in both hospitals. My husband had end-of-life care there, it was so caring.

~ M.M.



My memory is about being a member of the staff at the hospital

I was privileged to work for many years at the hospital as Staff nurse, Ward Sister, Deputy Matron and then at the time of my retirement from the ward as Clinical Nurse Specialist for Hospiscare, which was based at the hospital supporting palliative care in the community. My memories are of a wonderful team of committed people all with a common aim to provide high quality care, a wealth of experience, to make the passage of patients, their relatives as comfortable as possible to regain health, or comfort at the end of life. I am so proud of the care that was delivered close to patients' community. We were a experienced team of clinicians and fantastic support team which provided care on a daily basis and worked effectively with the multi disciplinary team for the best outcome for the patients.

~ A.L.

1993-2013

My memory is about being a member of the staff at the hospital

" I worked as a midwife in the old and new Okehampton Hospital. I loved my time there as part of a tremendous team. We were able to offer excellent personalised care to all our mothers and their families. it was a privilege to be so involved in the local community. It is a great shame to see this wonderful hospital so under used when the large hospitals are under such pressure.



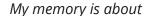
My memory is about being a member of the staff at the hospital

" I worked at the hospital in the capacity of a GP in Okehampton from its inception to when I retired in 2011.

~ **D.G.**

~ K.T.

.2002 till 2008



" 1. The community putting money in buckets and bonding over feeling that we were investing in our community future together. 2. The Bell. The Bell was donated to the new hospital from the old hospital/workhouse (Castle Hospital). It was to symbolise us moving forward to better healthcare provision.

~ **L.C.** 2003

" Always being asked to come for -rays, physio and scans. Always efficient, not time wasting, always ontime and an easy journey from Moretonhampstead thus relieving pressure on RD&E or Torbay. Ludicrous to close and if wards re-opened again less pressure on RD&E for bed blocking.

~ J.E.



My memory is about

"Bed blocking is my concern. Always has been a problem, even before Covid. Also nearer than Exeter or Derriford to visit people. I myself could have done with one of the wards open as have been hospitalized twice with cellulitis. Lovely staff at all levels in the 'old days' before the closure of the wards.

~ B.R.



My memory is about

" Fantastic day treatment much better than going all the way to Exeter Hospital. Easy parking. Great staff.

~ H.L.

" I have a nut allergy and a few years ago had a serious reaction. My partner drove me to the Okehampton hospital where they stabilised my condition, which was described as life threatening and transfered me to Exeter hospital where I received further treatment and gained full recovery. My condition was time critical and if the hospital had not been there the outcome may have been very different. My thanks go to all concerned for their prompt action.

My memory is about

"I have been fortunate in not having to have to use the wards but it has been very useful for minor injuries and other clinics. My main use was as a patient at the doctors' surgery based there. We were directed there when we first moved to Okehampton, as the other surgery was 'full'. Well, it's 'fuller' now! In recent years it would have been a boon to many of my older (less mobile) friends if there had been a cottage hospital type recuperation ward. They have had to travel by public transport or taxi to Exeter to visit their sick and dying relatives, all of which adds stress to a very difficult time.

~ M.B.

~ **R.A.** 2009

Pre closing the surgery. 2012?

My memory is about

I think the Okehampton Community Hospital needs to be open because if it is the patients aren't going to have to travel so far to access for local health-care and seeing there local NHS. I think it's important to open our hospital so people don't have to travel so far to see a doctor or if local people in our community are really ill and can't travel long distances because of financial cost of public transport as our community struggles with the cost of public transport and I think if the hospital is open here everyone in the local community will be able to get to a nearby hospital better.

~ H.M.

" I was able to have a chest x-ray and also a scan on my abdomen. Both these times saved me from having to visit Exeter.

~ M.H.

2023



My memory is about

" I was having difficulty breathing and was seen out-of-hours as an urgent patient. I don't drive so it would have meant calling an ambulance as there was no way I could afford a taxi.

~ **J.G.** 2019



My memory is about

" I was lucky enough to get a hearing aid at Okehampton hospital, saving a trip into Exeter. This is a very useful resource for our area. I have also have attended for physio appointments and x-rays. Being elderly it takes the pressure off, not having to travel to Exeter or one of the other hospitals. It will be sad to see it closed completely, and as the population keeps increasing it would be a very valuable resource to help the local people. [They] could also reinstate the doctors surgery as it's so difficult to get appointments at the Medical Centre, there is just not enough [care] for the size of population of Okehampton.

~ P.P.

Several times last one was physio in February 2022

"In late 2012 my father was almost 90 and in failing health. A dear friend of his was in Okehampton hospital receiving end-of-life care and my father was able to visit him daily on his mobility scooter. This gave them both enormous comfort and wouldn't have been possible had his friend been in Exeter. My father's friend died peacefully at Okehampton Hospital just before Christmas and my father outlived him by just a few weeks. Those last weeks were very precious to both men and their families.

~ **R.C.** 2012

My memory is about

" Multiple trips to the Minor Injuries Unit and many visits to physio and x-ray. Still attending physio now.

~ C.H.

My memory is about

"My elderly friend has now been discharged from the RD&E Hospital and sent to Tiverton. This has happened to several very elderly people I know. Having visitors is so important to people's well-being and recovery. It is a significant distance to Tiverton, a round trip of over 60 miles. This is not only time-consuming but costly for many people, particularly if they wish to visit daily or frequently. Other options appear to be Exmouth, also a distance away. A ward in Okehampton would be so beneficial and enable people to have more contact with family and friends. The recovery time would, I'm sure, be quicker. And if someone is in their final days the comfort of having people there is so important.

~ H.W.

" My first grandaughter.

~ **R.H.** 2005



My memory is about

" My husband was able to receive his chemo therapy as the hospital instead of constantly traveling to Exeter. The staff at *Force* were so kind and willing to do whatever they could to make it easier for us.



My memory is about

" My mother (visiting from Australia) fell and cut her forehead badly. They glued her together. Amazing.

~ **J.A.** 2014



"There are many ... The birth of my youngest child at the maternity unit; being so local it was great for my older children to visit every day after school. Coming back to Okehampton maternity unit after the birth of my eldest child to recover, the care and patience of the midwives and nurses was just wonderful for a new mum. The care given to my elderly step-dad who was there for re-ablement after his hip operation and then his end-of-life care meant we could visit far more often. Our hospital is badly needed by all, young, old and everyone in between.

~ **D.T.** 1987, 1993, 2006

My memory is about

Well the good news is, Dad is home. The not so good is he has been given 6 extra meds to be taken at different times of day and different dose. He can't read the small writing so I have had to try to put the required dose in bowls with times written in big letters. I will also have to go round at least twice-a-day till the extra meds have finished. I am not really complaining as I will do it as he is my dad and I love him but if we had Wardhayes or the cottage hospital he could be there and safer. He has had an ambulance 6 times since Xmas! He has had 4 stays in hospital and they have sent him home in my mind too early as he doesn't take his meds properly so hasn't recovered from pnemonia ...

~ K.H.