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Patient power to fight hospital cuts

July 15, 2005 09:04

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PATIENT groups have united to warn they will fight for Suffolk's threatened health services.

The county's Patient Public Involvement (PPI) forums took the step as health bosses look to make cuts and closures to save millions of pounds.

In a statement issued by the PPI groups, members express their concern over closures and loss of community beds at Aldeburgh, Felixstowe and Eye.

A total of 16 beds and the minor injuries unit at Aldeburgh Hospital have been axed and 25 beds have been removed from the Bartlet Hospital, Felixstowe, while Hartismere Hospital, in Eye, is under review.

The statement said: "We, as joint members, are taking this matter very seriously and will be writing to senior ministers, also inviting local Members of Parliament to meet with us as a matter of urgency to discuss these problems.

"Any closures of beds in hospitals and the community will just put extra pressures on the already over-stretched hospitals.

"This will cause worry and distress to many people who at present receive excellent care in their own communities.

"This could be seen as a short sighted answer to immediate financial constraints, but in the long term could be a retrograde step. Once a hospital is closed it would be very difficult to reopen it."

Meanwhile, Jenny Brabazon, chairman of the PPI Forum for Suffolk Coastal, has written to the EADT asking the area's Primary Care Trust (PCT) how other services, particularly GP out of hours, will cope with the reduction of Minor Injury Unit (MIU) services in Aldeburgh and Felixstowe. She is concerned that the number of out of hours doctors and doctor hours will be increased.

She said: "Some people in Aldeburgh are resigned, feeling powerless and depressed. Others are very angry indeed, feeling that they are not just seeing services cut, but seeing them removed altogether."

She said although the Aldeburgh MIU was not intended to deal

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with emergencies it had provided life-saving treatment. Travel to Felixstowe's unit could be distressing for patients in Aldeburgh, she claimed.

"An hour is a long time if you have an internal injury, are losing blood, or if you suffer from asthma."

She said Carole Taylor-Brown, chief executive of the Suffolk East PCTs, would have to be a superwoman to sort out the financial "mess" and save £18.4m.

Miss Brabazon said: "There needs to be more investment in rural health services across Suffolk. It is not fair to compare the NHS, which makes life and death decisions, with 'business' as many do.

"It is not a PLC, nor a Post Office general store. But of course any organisation, be it public or private, charitable or voluntary, must have sound financial planning, discipline and reporting."

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