

Ref: FOIA Reference 2020/21-185

**Royal Stoke University Hospital**  
**Data, Security and Protection**  
Newcastle Road  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST4 6QG

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020

Email [foi@uhn.nhs.uk](mailto:foi@uhn.nhs.uk)

Dear

I am writing in response to your email dated 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020 sent to the PALs email generic email address, requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) regarding maternity visiting

On 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020 we contacted you via email as we required the following clarification:

- Please can you elaborate on what decisions you are referring to, as you mentioned “including” which suggests you are interested in other areas
- Please can you confirm the timeframe in order for us to collate the information, giving a beginning and an end date

On the same day you replied via email with the following:

*“To clarify, as well as the points I specifically mention, I would like to know the following:*

*What alternative have the hospital provided for antenatal education in the absence of classes?*

*Has the hospital considered the impact of these restrictions from a patient perspective as part of their decision making; that is, has the mental health of the birthing women been taken into account where women will be anxious at being alone? How has this been assessed and by which group of professionals?*

*Once women are admitted to the hospital, are they allowed to leave the ward area, including going outside the building(s)? If no leaving is allowed, how has this decision been justified against a persons right to leave, where hospital birth is their chosen option?”*

We replied via email asking again for a timeframe in order to collate the information.

You replied with the following:

*“I’m afraid I don’t understand this question then, I do not know how I can dictate a timeframe for your team, not knowing anything about the team?”*

*Please therefore clarify your ask.”*

We responded via email:

We are asking for what period of time do you want this information? The last 6 months or longer? or are you asking if that UHNM has always had this procedure in place.

You replied via email with the following:

*“I would like this information beginning from when UHNM responded to the covid-19 outbreak which instigated the restrictions up to present day”*

As of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2014 University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust (UHNM) manages two hospital sites – Royal Stoke University Hospital, and County Hospital (Stafford). Therefore the response below is for the two sites combined from that date where appropriate.

**Q1 I want to make a Freedom of Information request to the hospital regarding the **decisions made about maternity care** in the hospital:**

- Including why birthing partners are not welcome until active labour,
- Why visiting is restricted to one hour per day.
- I would be interested in seeing the risk assessments for this decision and how often they are being reviewed.

If you could give me a name and email address if someone I can speak to regards the above, I would be very grateful.

**Clarified:** To clarify, as well as the points I specifically mention, I would like to know the following:

- What alternative have the hospital provided for antenatal education in the absence of classes?
- Has the hospital considered the impact of these restrictions from a patient perspective as part of their decision making; that is, has the mental health of the birthing women been taken into account where women will be anxious at being alone?
- How has this been assessed and by which group of professionals?
- Once women are admitted to the hospital, are they allowed to leave the ward area, including going outside the building(s)?
- If no leaving is allowed, how has this decision been justified against a person’s right to leave, where hospital birth is their chosen option?

**Time frame clarified: *when UHNM responded to the covid-19 outbreak which instigated the restrictions up to present day***

**A1 COVID 19 Impact on Care Provision**  
NHS England published guidance in March 2020 stating that:

Visiting is suspended with immediate effect until further notice  
The only exceptional circumstances where one visitor – an immediate family member or carer will be permitted to visit are listed below:

- The patient you wish to visit is recovery end of life
- You are the birthing partner accompanying a woman in labour
- You are the parent or appropriate adult visiting a child

All Maternity Hospitals therefore were compelled to follow NHS advice as the risk to spreading the virus at that time was considered greater than the potential consequences of allowing visitors into hospitals.

The NHS guidance to support the attendance of a partner during labour as a priority, even at the height of COVID 19, clearly demonstrated an understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of both mother and partner. This was a decision we at UHNM fully endorsed and complied with.

At the end of July 2020 the Royal College Midwives (RCM) circulated a briefing paper on the Re-introduction of visitors to Maternity Units across the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. The papers recognises that the highly infectious disease continues to be a cause for concern however does recommend that visiting restriction should be reviewed with a phased reintroduction planned. The RCM also recognises that as all Maternity Units will have differing and varied profile in terms of the space, layout, side rooms, type of hospital e.g. a birthing unit or a high level obstetric unit the plan has to be a local decision. This does mean that Maternity Units will reintroduce visiting at different rates and in a variety of different ways.

At UHNM the reintroduction of visiting has been discussed and we are in the process of planning a further opening of our visiting regime. We have planned to extend our visiting hours on the post-natal ward and reintroduce visiting for inpatient antenatal women.

The existing visiting regime remains; when a woman is admitted to the labour ward partners are welcome to attend as it is for those women undergoing a planned caesarean section.

### Parent Education

The health and welfare of our women is driven through the clinical pathways that exist; at UHNM we have worked extremely hard to minimise any adverse impact on our pathways. We are very pleased that we have not had to make any changes to antenatal, scanning or our labour ward services. Home births and water births were discontinued however they have since been reopened.

Our traditional Parent Education classes have been postponed. This decision was made primarily because face to face contact particularly in large groups was not permitted. Antenatal Education however continues in the form of:

- During each antenatal appointment the midwife will provide education in terms of public health advice i.e. dietary, smoking, alcohol, exercise, vaccinations, fetal activity, preeclampsia, signs of labour etc.
- Information is available on the pregnancy electronic records with sign posting to various support facilities
- Infant feeding is discussed during the antenatal period with a telephone helpline set up to support new mums at home
- We have produced a video tour of the maternity unit that is currently being edited

### Leaving the ward areas

We do ask that both visitors and women respect that frequently leaving and re-entering any area increases the potential risk of the spread of coronavirus. The risk is increased not just for

staff but also for other mothers and babies in the ward area. While we are not in a position to dictate we are grateful that women and families are largely compliant.

\*Please note that any individuals identified do not give consent for their personal data to be processed for the purposes of direct marketing.

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An anonymised copy of this request can be found on the Trust's disclosure log, please note that all requests can be found at the following link: <http://www.uhnm.nhs.uk/aboutus/Statutory-Policies-and-Procedures/Pages/Freedom-of-Information-Disclosure-Log.aspx>

This letter confirms the completion of this request. A log of this request and a copy of this letter will be held by the Trust.

If you have any queries related to the response provided please in the first instance contact my office.

Should you have a complaint about the response or the handling of your request, please also contact my office to request a review of this. If having exhausted the Trust's FOIA complaints process you are still not satisfied, you are entitled to approach the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and request an assessment of the manner in which the Trust has managed your request.

The Information Commissioner may be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF or via [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk).

If following review of the responses I can be of any further assistance please contact my secretary on 01782 671612.

Yours,



Jean Lehnert  
Data, Security & Protection Manager