



Latest news for our members and stakeholders

March 2026

This newsletter aims to keep you, our members and stakeholders, updated with the latest news from across the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

Top stories



Introduction from our Chief Executive Officer, Sam Higginson

Welcome to the March edition of our stakeholder and member newsletter. Across Devon we've experienced an unprecedented amount of rain since January, so I, perhaps like many of us, am hoping to see some much-needed sun this month, as we head into Spring.

I have talked previously about the financial challenges facing the NHS, not only nationally and across Devon but also within our own Trust. Simply, the Royal Devon is not only incredibly financially challenged, but is also falling short on a number of key performance standards. Despite everyone's efforts, we as a Trust now find ourselves needing to focus all our efforts and energies in turnaround and recovery.



We have been focused on this as a leadership team and know that the main reasons we are in this position are due to excess pressure on our acute hospital services which cause us to turn toward expensive short-term staffing solutions, too many patients in hospital beds when they are ready to be discharged, and too much focus on income generation instead of reducing costs.

Our patients are our priority, and we must take decisive action now to protect patient care. We are setting a robust three-year plan to help us recover financial stability so that we can deliver sustainable clinical services for our patients.

As part of ensuring Devon's health and care system is financially sustainable, we must save 5% of our budget every year for the next three years. This is around £66 million in 2026/27. While challenging, this target is achievable if we take a systematic approach to doing things differently and engage our workforce and wider stakeholders in the need for change.

Our plan includes driving transformation and changing how our services are delivered to improve outcomes for our patients, in particular reducing demand for hospital care, strengthening out-of-hospital care and increasing our productivity – using digital technology to accelerate this.

In this month's update, I'm proud to share some updates that start to show what we mean by this - patients being able to book blood tests at our community sites through MY CARE, our online patient portal, and how we're using Ambient Voice Technology to improve our productivity as well as patient experience.

We will keep you updated on our progress and I am committed to being open and transparent about our position and involving you - our patients and communities – as we change.

This newsletter is an important way that we do this - keeping us connected, sharing our news and providing opportunities for you to get involved in our work. I would like to encourage you to share your views on how we could improve it, to ensure it meets the needs of you, our readers. Tell us what you think by completing [this short survey](#).

I want to finish by saying how proud I am of colleagues and how thankful I am for the support we receive from our stakeholders, partners and communities across Devon. This is a pivotal moment for the Royal Devon and the scale of the challenge is considerable, however I am confident that by working together we can deliver the best possible care within the resources we have available now, and in the future.

Sam

Online booking through MY CARE for blood tests at Royal Devon community hospitals

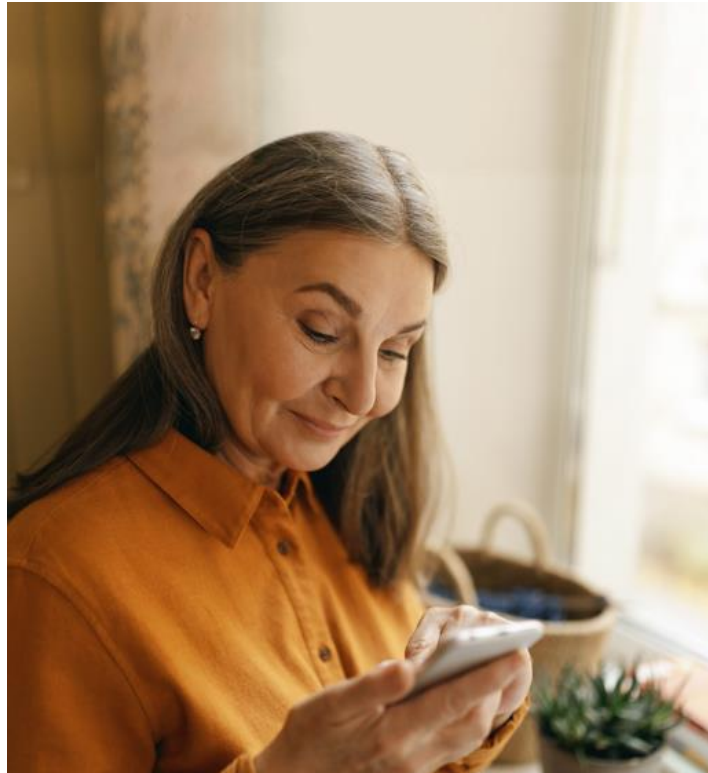
Patients at Royal Devon can now book community blood tests online using MY CARE.

The online booking system is available for community blood tests that have been requested by a Royal Devon clinician. The new feature is part of the Trust's

ambitious plans to use digital technology to improve patient care and reduce waiting times.

Over 100 patients have already used the service, with one patient saying, “It was perfect...I was able to go in and see lots of different appointments for my blood test. There was one available the same day, so I booked the same day. It was very easy to use.”

You can find out more on our website [here](#).



BBC Spotlight find out more about Ambient Voice Technology at Royal Devon

We welcomed BBC Spotlight last week to find out more about how the Trust is using Ambient Voice Technology (AVT) to improve patient care, be more productive and reduce waiting times.

AVT uses speech-to-text artificial intelligence (AI) to capture consultations and produce accurate notes and letters for clinician approval. AVT has already supported over 2,700 outpatient consultations at the Royal Devon. We've had positive feedback from patients on the quality of appointments and records, and clinicians reporting improved accuracy of documentation and more time available to see patients.

The BBC reported on how AVT is working in practice in our outpatient departments to create around 15,000 additional appointments across the Trust annually. The

story, which aired on BBC Spotlight last week, heard directly from a patient and consultant about the benefits. You can [read the article on the BBC news website](#).

We're now building on the work in outpatients to lead a pilot using Ambient Voice Technology in Emergency Departments. You can [read more here](#).



Come along to our AccessAble event and see how we're improving accessibility

You're invited to a special **patient experience and accessibility event** where you'll be able to find out more about our brand new AccessAble accessibility guides and meet with our patient experience team.

The online guides will provide patients and visitors with accessibility information about our sites to show what a place is really like before arriving, using clear facts and photos to help plan a visit with confidence.



We hope the new guides will reduce uncertainty for people with disabilities or additional needs, support independence, and promote inclusivity across our services. It also reflects our commitment to ensuring accessibility is not an afterthought, but a core part of how we deliver care.

The event will take place at the RILD, Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital on **Thursday 16 April at 2pm - 3.30pm**. Book your place [here](#).

Everyone is welcome, and we are committed to making this event accessible and comfortable for all attendees.

Other news



Cancer blood test detection research rolls out to 60 practices in Devon

A pilot project to help GPs spot early warning signs of cancer from routine blood tests has now rolled out to 60 GP practices in Devon.

Led by the University of Exeter and the Royal Devon, the High or Elevated Level of Platelets (HELP) Flag study involves a new way of analysing routine blood tests taken by GPs.

A high platelet count can sometimes be an indicator of certain types of cancer, including lung and bowel cancers.

Levels of platelets vary depending on age, and whether a person is male or female. The Exeter team has developed an algorithm to apply more personalised thresholds, to more accurately pick up who might be at risk.

Find out more on our [website here](#).



NHS collaboration scoops major award for safer stroke care

A cutting-edge collaboration, including experts from the Royal Devon and the University of Exeter, has been recognised for its contribution to stroke treatment and care.

The Thrombolysis in Acute Stroke Collaboration (TASC) were awarded the HSJ Patient Safety Award in November for their pioneering work making stroke treatment safer and faster.

Hospitals taking part in the initiative have seen an impressive 45% increase in the number of stroke patients receiving clot-busting treatment and have cut treatment times from about 60 minutes to 40 minutes.

Find out more about [this collaboration here](#).



Members of the team from Royal Devon and the University of Exeter at the HSJ awards

Viewing appointments marks first step towards linking the NHS App and MY CARE

It is now possible to view elements of your Royal Devon medical information using the NHS App.

A common request from patients has been to make MY CARE work with the NHS App. The MY CARE team at Royal Devon have been working with software provider Epic and NHS England to find a secure way of doing this.

From Wednesday 4 March patients logged into the NHS App will start to see some of their Royal Devon appointments alongside their GP appointments. This is the first step towards linking the NHS App and MY CARE.



Work will continue over the coming months.

[Read more here.](#)

WATCH: time-lapse demolition of old NDDH residences as new build begins

We're celebrating another major milestone in the Our Future Hospital programme this month, as construction work is now officially underway on our new £22.7 million residences project at North Devon District Hospital.

Funded by the national New Hospital Programme (NHP), the new staff and student accommodation will provide 120 en-suite bedrooms. Work is due to be complete in autumn 2027.

The project represents a vital step forward on our path towards developing our main clinical buildings, including new fit for purpose operating theatres, intensive care unit, increased diagnostic facilities and new women's and children's facilities. The residences will also be essential for attracting and retaining healthcare professionals, supporting recruitment and retention of skilled staff.

Of course, before work could begin, Munro and Chichester House had to be demolished as the new residences will be built on this part of the site. New [time-lapse footage](#) has captured the entire process, giving a fascinating insight into the project and condensing three months of work into one minute!

You can watch the video by clicking on the below image.



Behind the scenes with...



In this month's behind the scenes we meet the theatre assistants from the South West Ambulatory Orthopaedic Centre (SWAOC) at our Nightingale Hospital Exeter.

Making more productive use of our theatre space will help us tackle our challenges, and the SWAOC team are already doing amazing work, with patients often able to go home the same day as their surgery.

Hannah, Sarah, Slamowira, and Rahul are part of a fantastic team who play a vital role in supporting our surgical team and ensuring patients feel safe, comfortable, and cared for throughout their surgery.

Tell us a little about your role:

Theatre assistants help with everything needed during procedures, working closely with scrub practitioners, surgeons, and anaesthetists. This includes assisting patients, helping prepare theatres for operations and supporting colleagues during surgery.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

For Hannah and Sarah, it's working alongside a great team and experiencing the sense of accomplishment that comes with being part of life-changing operations.

Slamowira enjoys helping patients: "I like talking to them, calming them down and making sure they are happy and not stressed about anything."

Rahul says: "What I enjoy the most is the opportunity to learn new things every day."

Read the full article on our [website here](#).



Pictured above - theatre assistants Hannah, Sarah, Slamowira and Rahul

Get involved



Share your views on this newsletter!

Our member and stakeholder newsletter is a monthly publication to update you, our key stakeholders, members, patients and the public, about the latest news happening at the Royal Devon.

As part of a review of the newsletter and to ensure it meets the needs of our readers, we would like to hear from you to understand what improvements we could make.

Please [share your views here](#).

Thank you.



Help us shape the right services for older people in Devon

We're developing a Frailty Strategy and would like to know what local older people (over 65) living with frailty and their family/carers feel is important to them, and how they would like to see services developed around their needs.

We want to ensure that the care we provide is guided by the people who use our services every day, and your experiences and insights are essential in helping us shape the right services.

Share your views in our [survey here](#).



Royal Devon Hospitals Charity news

Find out how you can support the Royal Devon Hospitals Charity [here](#).

Skateathon raises £7k to support cancer services

Around 70 skaters took part in an epic 18-hour skate-a-thon at Stoppers Roller Rink in Barnstaple, raising an incredible £7,788 in support of cancer services in North Devon.

We were delighted to catch up with Erica and Lianne from Stoppers recently to receive their fantastic donation, which is being split between the Royal Devon Hospitals Charity Fern Centre and Chemo Hero, both of which do brilliant things for people in North Devon affected by cancer.

Read [more here](#).

Showbiz still sparkles for Gordon at 91!

Gordon Bess from Exeter has spent a lifetime in showbiz and is still going strong aged 91. His charity concerts have raised thousands of pounds for Royal Devon Hospitals Charity.

“It is a pleasure and very rewarding, whenever practical, to support a local charity such as Royal Devon Hospitals Charity,” said Gordon.

“Being able to bring artists, audiences and the hospital charity together is a gesture of appreciation to those NHS staff who continue to care for us all.”

Read Gordon’s inspirational story [here](#).



News in brief



Devon Sexual Health launches new website

Devon Sexual Health has [launched a new website](#) designed to empower people to better understand and manage their sexual health.

Help us improve the complaints process at the Royal Devon

We've partnered with Healthwatch Devon, an independent champion for people using health and care services to gather feedback from patients, families and carers about our complaints process. Share your views [here](#).

Follow the Trust on social media

Follow our Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and LinkedIn pages for all our latest updates as they happen!



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NHS and CARE working with communities and local organisations to improve people's lives

