

## **The Vital Contribution of our Community Hospitals**

Members of the Community Hospital Association (CHA) were interested to see Dame Clare Gerada's recent quote in the Evening standard: "Bring back cottage hospitals to free capacity in NHS, says senior health leader"(1). The use of language was very telling. Cottage Hospitals are now more commonly known as Community Hospitals.

Dame Gerada's sentiments regarding multimorbidity and frailty were spot on. However fortunately the Cottage Hospitals did not all "get closed down" as she has suggested. They continue to offer a key part of local community services providing a range of acute services, inpatient services, outpatient services, as well as diagnostic and treatment services and urgent care (2) . It is true however that in some areas bed numbers have been reduced.

The CHA study on the contribution of community hospitals during COVID-19 demonstrates the diversity and wide range of services Community Hospitals provide to their surrounding community and locality (3). 31 case studies of good practice and quality improvements show just how important these local rural hospitals are to the local population, and the local health and care system (4).

A recent study on community hospitals, undertaken by the University of Birmingham with the CHA highlighted their inherent value to the local community (5). Community Hospitals can also provide remote services to avoid transfer to the main hospital as illustrated in Cornwall. They provide Minor Injury Units or Urgent Treatment Centres again treating minor illnesses such as cuts, abrasion, sprains and fractures. They are often located in more convenient locations for the frail population.

Community Hospitals are often lost in the fog of strategic change and not brought to the table when key decisions are being made regarding allocation of resources and local service provision. Now, more than ever before, Community Hospitals should be included in key decisions regarding the future of healthcare in the UK. We have an ageing population with increasing frailty, whose needs are not well served in an Acute Hospital environment. There are so many benefits to Community Hospitals impossible to list here. However they need to be included in the conversation and there needs to be true integration of services.

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#### References

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