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Media Release

New support for armed forces community at RUH

Support for people who are serving in the armed forces, reservists or who are veterans, has been expanded at the Royal United Hospitals Bath (RUH) NHS Foundation Trust.

A brand new role – a welfare officer, from charity Defence Medical Welfare Service – has been introduced to ensure that patients who are from the armed forces community can access the wide range of additional services that are available to them. This extends to those who have family connections to the forces too.

The extra help can include referrals for health-related needs such as mental health, substance misuse and physical wellbeing. The RUH can also help with supported referrals for other factors that affect a person's welfare, including education and training, housing, employment and much more.

Fiona Leslie, who is working as the RUH's Defence Medical Welfare Officer, said: "People serving or who have served in the military are exposed to lots of very different challenges and experiences that most of us will never come across as civilians.

"They, and their families, sacrifice so many aspects of their lives to serve the nation, so the least we can do is support them and their family members and carers when they need it.

"There is a lot of support out there for a wide variety of welfare needs, but people have to be aware of it and able to access it, and that's what I can help with.

"It's better for the RUH too, as having the right support means that people don't need to stay in hospital longer than necessary or have an unnecessary readmission because support when they are discharged isn't in place."

The RUH is an accredited Veteran Aware hospital, a Gold member of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, and has worked closely with the Defence Medical Welfare Service to enable this latest improvement.

Patients will now be asked about their armed forces status as a standard question when they come to the RUH and, with their permission, can be put in touch with Fiona. Patients can also contact Fiona directly using the contact details on the [RUH website](#).

There is no minimum length of service which makes someone a veteran and eligible for this extra support, it can be just one day.

Cara Charles-Barks, RUH Chief Executive and Honorary Colonel of 243 (The Wessex) Field Hospital said: "We're committed to listening to the people we care for, and acting on what matters most to them.

"Being part of the armed forces community is a really important part of people's identity, and it's essential that we recognise that people might have slightly different needs as a result of this.

"I'm delighted that our support has been expanded – it's part of our responsibility to ensure that we're delivering the best possible care. We will continue listening, learning and responding."

Find out more on the RUH website:

https://www.ruh.nhs.uk/about/veteran_aware/defence_medical_welfare_service.asp?menu_id=7d

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Notes to Editor:

About the service:

The United Kingdom Armed Forces are the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, British Army and Royal Air Force. The communities include existing personnel and reservists, cadets, veterans, families and carers.

There is no minimum length of service which makes someone a veteran, it can be just one day.

This service can support any patient, including outpatients. Staff can also access support.

About the RUH:

At the RUH we're proud to put people at the heart of what we do, striving to create an environment where everyone matters. Everyone means the people we care for, the people we work with and the people in our community.

We provide a wide range of services including medicine and surgery, services for women and children, accident and emergency services, and diagnostic and clinical support services.

We also provide specialist services for rheumatology, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome/ME via the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases which we acquired in 2015.

In 2021, we acquired Sulis Hospital Bath, an independent hospital that provides care for both private and NHS patients. This has enabled us to provide more care for NHS patients, as well as continuing to provide private care to those who choose it. Any additional income earned through private care is reinvested in services for the benefit of the people we care for at both Sulis and the RUH.

We're currently building a new Cancer Centre at the RUH. The Dyson Cancer Centre, which is set to open in autumn 2023, will help transform the care we provide for patients, families and carers.

We work closely with other health and care organisations as members of the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board. We strive to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in our community by working together build one of the healthiest places to live and work.

We are rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

For more information about the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust visit: www.ruh.nhs.uk