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Media Release

Patients help transform RUH diabetes unit

People living with diabetes have helped to transform an outdated space at the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust into a bright and welcoming environment.

The hospital's diabetes unit has been freshened up thanks to the installation of bright, colourful murals designed by local artist Natasha Clutterbuck, as well as small-scale watercolours which were created by the patients themselves.

The project came about when Dr Laura Rich, Diabetes and Endocrine Consultant and Young Adult Lead at the RUH, contacted Diabetes UK for support with a review of the RUH's services for young adults with diabetes.

Aled Newton, Together Type 1 Youth Coordinator for Southwest, and the DUK Health Systems Change Team worked with Laura and other teams at the RUH to focus on patient engagement and find out what mattered most to young people, their families and carers.

Young Leaders from Together T1 and young people who receive care at the RUH then took part in a series of workshops where they identified ways to improve the service, which will include introducing monthly 'check in' texts, self-booking appointments, better transition information and peer support events.

One other key area where young people wanted to see improvement was the appearance of the department.

Following the service review, Diabetes UK provided the RUH team with a grant for £5,000 to start improvement works. Dr Rich wanted to ensure patients were involved in transforming the look of the department themselves, so contacted Art at the Heart, the RUH's in-house art and design team, who invited artist Natasha to join the project.

Natasha, who has previously created a series of award-winning murals for the Dyson Cancer Centre, proposed murals with the theme of 'Precious Pollinators and the Wild River making Its Way out to Sea.'

"My aim was to create a series of murals inspired by the vibrant, natural habitat of the riverbank," said Natasha. "The narrative carries visitors from the entrance and along the corridor in a visual journey along a river. Pollinators are precious like the lives of all the people who will use the diabetes unit, including patients and staff."

In addition to her murals, Natasha also led a series of creative workshops for diabetes patients of all ages to produce their own small-scale watercolour designs. People living with diabetes were able to unleash their creativity and share their lived experiences, with their final pieces being displayed in frames hung amongst the murals in the corridor.

Dr Rich said: "This project has completely transformed our diabetes department for the people we care for and our staff too."

"It has been a truly collaborative experience – involving patients from start to finish, and with the fantastic support of Diabetes UK, which has helped make all this possible."

"This is about more than just buildings though, through this project we have also put in place several key service improvements for our young people based on their feedback."

"I'd like to thank everyone involved for their time, help and support and for their contribution to transforming the look and feel of the RUH's diabetes department."

"We have now been fortunate to receive additional funding from the Friends of the RUH to continue with our improvement project, so more work is being planned – watch this space!"

The next phase of the project will include the department's waiting area, with a mural depicting the river's arrival at the coast.

The improvements have been overwhelmingly well received by service users.

One said of the creative workshops: "I didn't know how much I would be able to do and I loved it. It inspired me – super event!"

Another said: "It was really inspiring and I'm looking forward to a very calm and creative space to attend appointments."

Others called the project 'fantastic', 'therapeutic' and praised its collaborative approach.

Diane Smith, Head of Type 1 Services at Diabetes UK, said: "We're proud to have supported the RUH in transforming the diabetes unit into a more creative and welcoming space."

"By listening to feedback from young people living with diabetes and working closely with the RUH team, this project has made real improvements to how services are delivered and their environment."

“It’s been brilliant to see how creativity, collaboration and lived experience have come together to make the diabetes department better for everyone.”

Ends

Notes to Editor:

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.

Our new Dyson Cancer Centre brings together many of the RUH's cancer services under one roof to provide a cancer services hub for over 500,000 people in the South West. The centre includes the RUH's oncology, chemotherapy and radiotherapy services, a 22-bed inpatient ward, a dedicated pharmacy, research team and nuclear medicine and physics teams.

A key feature of the new centre is the Macmillan Wellbeing Hub. The three-storey hub provides a welcoming, non-clinical space designed around the needs of patients and their families. It also includes comfortable accommodation where relatives and loved ones can stay overnight.

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