

First NHS Veterans Rehabilitation unit announced

09 November 2018



Today, Friday 9 November, the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust (RNOH) has announced it has shortlisted three bidders who will compete for the final design and operation of a military veteran rehabilitation unit on their site in Stanmore, northwest London.

In advance of the 100th anniversary of the end of World War One, the RNOH hosted a turf cutting ceremony to mark the spot where the unit will be built. Clinicians, hospital staff and the British Legion were present and they welcomed this important move to improve medical care for injured veterans.

Due to open in early 2021, the unit will provide world-class care and rehabilitation for veterans with psychological as well as physical challenges. Services provided will include access to rehabilitation physicians and pain management experts as well as psychological and mental health support. The unit will be accessible both to current and former army personnel and to NHS patients, thereby bringing about a step change in NHS rehabilitation care.

The announcement of the unit was made alongside the hospital being appointed a Veteran Aware hospital. Veteran Aware hospitals ensure that the armed forces community do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens when accessing NHS services and that veterans can access the specific services the NHS and charities provide. The hospitals are part of a group called the Veterans Covenant Hospital Alliance.

The need for such specialist units was highlighted in the landmark Chavasse Report (2014) authored by Prof Tim Briggs, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the RNOH. The report identified areas where the NHS can and should do more to ensure better and greater continuity of care for those severely wounded in action or suffering debilitating musculoskeletal infirmity as a consequence of their military service.

The scale of caring for our veterans was highlighted in the Chavasse Report:

- In 2015 there were an estimated 2.56 million UK veterans residing in households across Great Britain
- 40.1% of 16-64 year old veterans have at least one long term condition of which 33.1% relate to legs and feet and 32% relate to back and neck
- 50.5% of 65+ year old veterans have at least one long term condition, of which 40% relate to legs and feet and 28.3% relate to back and neck

Prof Briggs said: “Two years ago I secured £2million of LIBOR* funding to help build the first veterans rehabilitation unit. I could think of no better place to do that than the RNOH. Here, we have a critical mass of expertise that means we can look after these veterans in a unit that will cater for musculoskeletal rehab, as well as mental health issues and chronic pain. And because we are one of nine Murrison Veteran Centres that provide specialist prosthetic and rehabilitation services, it brings everything together on one site. I want to make this unit a centrepiece of a number of veteran rehab units that I hope we’ll build across the country over the next few years. The benefit will be for all NHS patients, we’ll join up with all the new Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford Hall, so that what we learn from the care we give veterans can be passed on to civilian NHS patients.

For me, it’s a real moment in my professional life in announcing this unit and I look forward to seeing it open in two years. And I hope, by then, we’ll have raised funds to build more.”

The unit will be part of a larger facility called Princess Eugenie House (PEH), named after the patron of the RNOH hospital charity. PEH will also include an Independent Living Unit, proving a rehabilitation centre for people with acute spinal cord injuries not yet ready to return home to live, and a modern family accommodation unit for the parents and carers of our paediatric patients.



NHS Veterans Rehabilitation unit announced (click image for slideshow).

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