

Southern Health and Social Care Trust Haematology Service Update

Trust Board

29 May 2025

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Southern Health and Social Care Trust Haematology Service following the escalation of workforce challenges on 3rd April 2025 at confidential Trust Board. This paper will set out the current workforce position and detail recent efforts to stabilise the service. The paper will also outline measures to support ongoing sustainability of the service.

Background

2. The Trust is commissioned to deliver Haematology services through a five-Consultant model supported by the wider team, with a 1 in 5 on-call rota.
3. Since 2021, there has been a reduction in medical staffing levels at Consultant and middle grade level. Ongoing efforts to recruit Consultants have been unsuccessful and following a further resignation, the service found itself at a critical Consultant staffing level with potential significant impact on patients, staff and service delivery.
4. Steps have been taken to alert the Strategic Planning and Performance Group and regional colleagues to the issues faced by the service and to request support to mitigate the impact.

Current Service Staffing Position

5. In addition to the two remaining substantive Consultants, there is a 'retire and return' Consultant supporting the team. The Trust has also recently secured two locum Consultants, who commenced work recently. It should be noted that there is a significant financial cost for these two locums.

6. Other medical staff within the team include a Specialist Doctor and a General Practitioner with Special Interest. The Resident Doctors include 1-2 rotating Resident Doctors. The Haematology service also employs a locum Senior House Officer grade Doctor for Mon-Friday 9-5pm cover.
7. A variety of non-medical staff support the service. These include 1 Physician Associate, 1 Advanced Nurse Practitioner, 1 Haematology Nurse Practitioner and 3 Prescribing Pharmacists. A new Consultant Pharmacist is due to commence post in June 2025.

Recruitment

8. Recruitment is ongoing
 - Substantive Consultant Haematologist posts advertised. To date there have been no applications
 - A recent doctor recruitment process has been successful with two posts offered following interviews on 29th April. One post has been accepted (start date to be confirmed), with the other offer awaiting response. The Specialty and Associate Specialist doctors will release Consultant capacity.
 - The recruitment of additional Locum Senior House Officer support is being explored.

External Support

9. Assistance is being provided from other Trusts including triage support, management of some new referrals, and support for more complex patient care.

Longer term actions

10. The current position is dependent upon the continued availability of the locums and continued support from regional colleagues. As such, there is a need to focus on longer term stabilisation.

11. The following measures are in place or are planned to facilitate longer term stabilisation of the service:

- Continued engagement with regional colleagues and the Strategic Planning and Performance Group.
- An internal Haematology Stabilisation Group will identify longer term actions required for a stable model of service delivery.
- The team are working with the Medical Human Resources team to promote the advertised Consultant posts and attract applicants.
- An application to apply a Recruitment and Retention Premium for Haematology Consultants has been made.
- Exploring opportunity to increase Non-Medical Prescriber activity.
- A fortnightly Haematology Resourcing forum has been established to oversee all activities.

Conclusion

12. The service finds itself currently in a more stable position with the immediate risk to service delivery and patients mitigated. It should be noted however, that this position is dependent upon the continued availability of the locums and continued support from regional colleagues, which may not be sustainable. It should also be noted that there is a significant financial cost for these two locums. Longer term stabilisation is required.