

Our Ref: AT

15 June 2017

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Dear colleagues

Many of you will have read in the GP Bulletin last week about plans for increased collaboration between Somerset Partnership and Taunton and Somerset NHS Foundation Trusts (TSFT). I wanted to explain a little more about this, why I think this is an exciting opportunity and to address some concerns which have been raised.

We all know how difficult it can be to do the best for our patients because of organisational barriers – the problems with sharing information, the disruption to a carefully crafted care plan at the weekend, or the failure to link physical and mental health in a constructive way. Strong collaboration between Somerset Partnership and TSFT facilitates the development of seamless care for our patients, the creation of new clinical pathways and streamlining of some organisational functions.

Concerns have been raised that we may concentrate our focus on pathways that serve the TSFT catchment area, compromising the service for patients who attend Yeovil District Hospital, Weston General Hospital and RUH for example. Or that we may draw services away from mental health and into the acute hospital, which would not be helpful for primary care. I think it is true that we will need to work hard at providing equity of service for patients outside the TSFT catchment, but we are determined to do so. Concerning mental health, one of the first collaborative projects we will develop is an integrated service for patients with both physical and mental health problems, medically unexplained symptoms and chronic pain. I have many patients this service could be invaluable for and I think this will only support primary care. Other plans include providing a seamless stroke service for patients and a psychiatric liaison service to improve the care for patients at Musgrove with mental health needs.

Is the alignment of Somerset Partnership and TSFT part of a bigger plan to take over primary care in Somerset? This is not the case. Running and sustaining general practice in Somerset is not easy in the present climate and neither Trust has an ambition to extend their involvement in primary care provision beyond supporting practices when asked. Both trusts are aware that a strong primary care is essential for the provision of health and social care services in Somerset and are determined to support it.

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Over the next days, weeks and months we will be asking for your ideas on how we can make this collaboration a real success. A small group from the hospital, Somerset Partnership, the STP and the CCG would like to visit practices to explain the numerous conversations and developments that have been going on, what opportunities may be open for your practice and whether or how the Trusts can be helpful to you. We hope you will see these visits as a chance to give us the benefit of your experience of services, so we can ensure that any new developments will work for you.

Many thanks

Yours sincerely

**DR ANDREA TRILL**  
**General Practitioner**  
**Deputy Medical Director - Taunton and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust**