

HEALTH EMERGENCY

The Health Watchdog

PRESS RELEASE
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Immediate

CAMPAIGNERS AND UNIONS CALL FOR HALT TO MENTAL HEALTH BED CLOSURES

Campaigners and trade unions today called for a halt to a consultation exercise which would lead to the closure of AL3 ward at the world-famous Maudsley Hospital in south London in a desperate bid to save £400,000 from the local mental health Trust's budget.

In a detailed response to the proposals (attached), pressure group London Health Emergency and staff union UNISON warn that the closure of the ward ignores the growing pressure on mental health beds from the impact of the recession and that the loss of capacity will increase private sector referrals – potentially costing the NHS more in private fees that they hope to save.

The closure of AL3 – a male in-patient, acute ward serving residents of Lambeth – would result in a net loss of 7 beds. Campaigners are challenging the suggestion that there is any spare capacity available in mental health services in south London which could pick up the caseload. With private sector mental health beds costing over £300 a night it is possible that the total annual cost to the NHS of the bed closures could rack up to over £750,000 a year – far more than they are planning to save.

Staff are also warning that they are already seeing an increased demand for mental health services as a direct result of the recession. Politicians, clinicians, charities and academics are all warning that the recession will increase the rate of breakdowns and will increase the need for high quality, mental health capacity – making a nonsense of the planned bed losses at the Maudsley.

Geoff Martin, Health Emergency Head of Campaigns, said:

"It is clear that the planned bed losses, through the closure of AL3 ward at the Maudsley, have not been thought through and would have dire consequences for patients as the recession piles pressure on mental health services. That key factor has been totally ignored.

We are also warning that the closure would be a false economy. Patients will be driven to expensive private sector referrals blowing a massive hole in the financial projections. The consultation should be halted immediately."

ENDS

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